

MY CONNAUGHT COUSINS.

BY

HARRIETT JAY,

AUTHOR OF 'THE QUEEN OF CONNAUGHT,' 'TWO MEN AND
A MAID,' 'THE PRIEST'S BLESSING,' ETC., ETC.

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE Authoress of *My Connaught Cousins*, smarting under a certain misconception, but thinking that polemics of any kind ill befit a lady's pen, has asked me to write a few prefatory words explaining how this book and its predecessors came to be written, and how unjust is the charge, made in one influential quarter, that she is an enemy to Irish nationality. The task is a difficult one, especially as I sympathise more strongly than she does with the present *political* movement, and am, indeed, much more of an advanced Liberal; but we are entirely

at one in our sympathy with the social life and aims of the Irish people, and in our love for what is best and noblest in the Irish nature. In these days of haste and folly, anything really original in literature is certain to be misunderstood. When the *Queen of Connaught* appeared, its great and instantaneous success was unconnected with its most sterling characteristic—that of an entirely new (but I believe the only true) reading of the national character and temperament. Subsequent events have justified that reading in an extraordinary manner ; and it is clearly understood now that the familiar Irishman of literature and the stage, the merry, good-humoured ‘ Pat ’ of a thousand novels and melodramas, was more or less a product of the inner consciousness. In a subsequent but far less successful work, unpopular from its rigid and terrible truth of delineation, the Authoress put her finger on the canker which now, as heretofore, poisons the wholesome life of Ireland ; but the *Priest’s Blessing*, though neglected now, will live as perhaps the most powerful social study that ever came from the mind of a young

girl. No unprejudiced person who reads that work, and takes it in connection with other works from the same pen, will doubt its deep insight—I should say, its unparalleled insight—into the nature of the Irish peasant.

The Authoress of these works went to Ireland when very young, lived for years in the wildest and loneliest part of the wild and lonely West, and was first inspired to literary effort by what she *saw* and *knew*. Her pictures were drawn from the very life, of which she was all that time a portion. She had no prejudices and no predispositions, and her sympathy, above all, was for the suffering people; and if in her portrayal she often had to describe moral darkness, she did so with a full sense of what was brightest and best on the other side of the picture. Behind the wretchedness and the squalor, the ignorance and the prejudice, beginning in misconception and culminating in crime, she showed the deep tenderness, the devoted patience, the sweetness and the purity, of the Celtic temperament. The characters of Dunbeg in the *Queen of Connaught*,

of Patrick O'Connor in the *Priest's Blessing*, of James Merton in the present work, are, as living types, unique in literature ; and the infinite pity of literary sympathy was never better exemplified than in the life story of 'Madge Dunraven' and 'Morna Dunroon,' or than in the tender idyll of 'How Andy Beg became a Fairy.'

Among the first to recognise the unique power of these stories, their fidelity to human nature, and their predominant dramatic power, was one of the foremost moral teachers of this or any time,—Mr Reade. Had they been unveracious, had they been in any sense productions of the inner consciousness, they would never have attracted that most keen-sighted of social observers ; had they lacked sympathy for their subject, had they been opposed to what was best in Irish life and character they would never have won his approval. But their veracity is vital and will prevail. Meantime, the reader is to be warned that they contain many things, present many pictures, which the false friends and summer lovers of Ireland must naturally regard with suspicion and dislike. The

true friends of Ireland, and all those who honestly sympathise with the national aspirations, will find in them that truth which genius only can reveal, and which, when once revealed, is fairer than any falsehood, however brightly drawn.

ROBERT BUCHANAN.



MY CONNAUGHT COUSINS



CHAPTER I.

IT was midsummer. The hottest sun that had warmed our soil for years shone its brightest upon city and suburb. All my friends were in the country, yet I remained shut up in my chambers, with nothing fairer to gaze upon than the withered grass and drooping trees of a smutty, smoke-begrimed London square. Heigho! It was weary work staying in London when all the world was wandering away by wood and stream! When I walked out the heat of the pavement scorched the leather of my shoes! The West End streets which I traversed were all deserted save for a few Indian ayahs and dyspeptic-looking gentlemen of the Baystock breed, who evidently existed on curry and red pepper, and felt no sort of discomfort when the thermometer registered one hundred in the shade. It was actually my first experience of summer in town!—that lucky spoon which had been in my possession ever since I was born with it in my mouth, having managed like an enchanter's wand to deposit me every former summer upon the bank of a salmon river or the knolls of a

grouse moor. For once, however, my luck had failed me, since, despite their winter's hard work, my hands lay passively in almost empty pockets, and my eyes rested gloomily upon the scorched and grimy streets of Babylon. Babylon without the 'waters,' or anything suggestive of coolness and pastoral rest.

As I mused and sulked, my meditations were disturbed by a step proceeding slowly round the square, and thrusting my head out of the window I beheld the postman. Even his habitually brisk tread had changed that day into a lagging, desultory kind of stroll. He came wearily on ; he paused before my door.

'Could the letter be for me?' I wondered, having nothing more important to occupy my brain,—for the postman had slipped a missive into the letter-box, given his feeble rat-tat, and strolled vacuously away. I was so much occupied with watching the man's retreating figure, that I was hardly conscious of a step on the stair, a tap at the door, and not until I heard the words,—'A letter, sir, if you please,' did I turn my head.

Then it was for me !—a white square envelope, addressed to 'John Stedman, Esq.,' in a hand which seemed, yet was not altogether, familiar. After scanning the writing I turned to the seal, and then I beheld, printed in small capitals, the word Ballyshanrany, and about it was entwined the triple-leaved shamrock. Having gazed for a few minutes at the mystical emblem, and still more mystical word, I tore open the envelope, and proceeded to acquaint myself with the contents. There were two letters, the first of which ran as follows :—

' Ballyshanrany,
Storport,
County Mayo,
Ireland.

'MY DEAR NEPHEW,—The girls, ever impatient to make your acquaintance, have for the last ten days

been worrying my life out to invite you here. In vain have I protested; in vain have I told them that a young London barrister must have more engagements than he knows what to do with; although I have asked you three times already, they declare that the third time is lucky, and that if I send this letter you'll come. So I send it. If you are not already disposed of for the season, I certainly believe you might do worse than spend a few weeks down here. We are homely, but comfortable; I can manage to put you in the way of a little sport;—Kate, who is a capital housekeeper, will see that you are properly fed, and the rest have promised to do what they can to amuse you. There's half-a-dozen of them, remember, but they are not bad colleens as colleens go, and if you come, sure they'll give you a hearty welcome! Think it over, and let us hear from you. Your affectionate uncle,
A. KENMARE.'

I read the letter twice; then throwing it on the table, I sat down lazily, cigar in mouth, to take my uncle's parting word of advice. I thought over his proposition, and the more I thought of it, the more I seemed to like it. I felt irresistibly impelled to accept it, at the same time I could not help regretting that I did not know a little more of the relations under whose roof I was invited to reside.

My uncle was an Irishman to the backbone, and, as far as I could gather, as warm-hearted an old fellow as ever trod the soil. Most of his early days had been spent in India, and it was not till rather late in life that he returned, married my mother's youngest sister, and settled down upon his native soil. As far as any family communication was concerned, they might have settled in Kamskatka, for after the marriage they seemed to be exiled entirely from their friends; but we heard from time to time that they were happy, and that strange little faces were appearing upon their hearth. At length one morning—about six years before the day on which my

uncle's third invitation fell into my hands—there came to our house a piece of news which almost broke my mother's heart, for she heard that her favourite sister, after having presented her husband with half-a-dozen daughters, had died, while the sixth little stranger was still a baby at her breast.

After this, the connection of the Kenmares with our branch of the family seemed to cease. We heard little or nothing of them, and I, busily engaged in working my way in the world, almost forgot that such close kin existed at all. I vaguely remembered, now that the circumstance was recalled to my mind, having received two letters of invitation from the old gentleman; but the invitations, coming doubtless at busy times, had never hitherto been tempting enough to draw me to Ireland. I had, consequently, written a polite refusal and dismissed the whole family from my mind.

Now, however, the case was different. I had nothing to do; I had nowhere to go; I was stifling in the smoky air of London, and longing for a breeze from the sea. Yes, the invitation was certainly tempting; it was one, moreover, which I should have accepted without a moment's hesitation, but for one appalling contingency—the half-dozen girls.


To some young fellows this might have been an inducement; to me it was the contrary. Nature never meant me for a lady's man, and the typical girl of modern life was certainly not to my taste. It was all very well to pass half-an-hour with persons of the other sex in a London drawing-room, but to have to spend one's entire vacation, surrounded by girls, was rather too much of a good thing.

'During the vacation,' I reflected, 'one wants male society, fair sport, and good cigars. To visit Ballyshannary simply means that I am to be perpetually bored with half-a-dozen boisterous Irish hoydens. The invitation, though sorely tempting, won't do for a bashful man. I will write my refusal without a moment's delay.'

I rose to carry out my resolution, when my eye,

wandering over the carpet, fell upon a folded sheet of paper which lay at my feet. Suddenly I remembered what, until then, I had entirely forgotten,—the second letter which the envelope contained, and which I had never taken the trouble to open at all. I lifted it, unfolded the sheet, and read as follows :—

‘DEAREST COUSIN JACK,—Ever since we read your speech in the paper, we have been dying to see you, so we hope that when you answer papa’s letter this time, you will not have the heart to say “no.” We have not the least idea what you are like; but we have conjured up all sorts of visions which are, no doubt, all wrong; but one thing we have decided, which is that, no matter what you are like, we mean to look after you just the same as papa. Nora will see to your gun with papa’s; Biddy will make cartridges for you, and Aileen will tie you some of her best flies; you shall do just as you like, and if you would rather not be bothered with so many girls, you shall spend nearly all your time alone with papa. But do come! Your affectionate cousins,

KATHLEEN,
NORA,
AILEEN,
OONA,
BRIDGET,
AMY, 
Her mark.

‘P.S.—Excuse the large blot. Amy writes so badly we thought it better to make her put her mark, and in her excitement she made the blot instead.

‘KATHLEEN.’

I sat down at once and wrote my reply.

‘MY DEAREST LITTLE CONNAUGHT COUSINS,—When I read your father’s letter, I intended to refuse his invitation, for I am afraid of girls in general, and the

thought of being surrounded by half-a-dozen appalled me ; but since I have read your letter my mind has changed. I have a sort of feeling you must be rather nice, and the temptation to make sure being too great to be resisted, I mean to come. I have a few things to settle before I can leave London, but in about a week from to-day expect me.—Believe me, till then, your affectionate cousin,

JACK STEDMAN.'

Having written the above, I added a line to the old gentleman, and the thing was done. In exactly a week from that day I turned my back on the smoke of London, and set out with heroic heart to try life in the wilds of Connaught.

CHAPTER II.

A DREARY day and a dreary prospect ; the air was damp and chilly, and a thin misty rain was falling and slowly penetrating to the skin of the half-clothed little urchins who were either crouching in the doorways or wildly driving along their donkeys loaded with creels of turf.

I was surveying this prospect from the window of the hotel, when the waiter suddenly appeared and announced that the car was at the door to convey me to my journey's end. I found the landlord with a face fit to grace a funeral. From the moment of hearing my place of destination, he had looked upon me as raving mad, and had accordingly treated me with great forbearance, as a person who was perhaps, on the whole, harmless enough, but not at all responsible for his actions. As for getting any information from him about the place, that was perfectly hopeless. When I approached the subject, he merely answered, 'Ah, it is a wild country, sir,' sighed deeply, shrugged his shoulders, and walked off, evidently feeling that he had done his duty ; and if I was rash enough to go after that, why, I must take the conse-

quences. Around him stood the ostler, the waiter, the boots, and about a dozen little ragged gorsoons, who stared at me with all their might and main, scrambled to obtain the few pence which were scattered amongst them, and uttered a wild Hooroo! as the car rolled away. The landlord's parting sigh was wafted to me on the chilly wind, and had the effect of damping my spirits for at least one-half of the day. So I rolled out of the town of Ballyferry, in the county of Mayo, Ireland, and was soon speeding along westward towards the ocean.

The beginning of the drive was not very enjoyable; the misty rain fell unceasingly, and the chilly wind was gradually awakening rheumatic reminiscences in my bones. The district through which I was passing was truly 'a wild country,' for the most part flat and boggy, and disfigured here and there by unsightly mounds of fresh-cut turf; yet the recent rain had imparted greenness and freshness to the small patches of pasture, and given tone and richness of colour to the little knolls of purple heather here and there dotted about the unsightly bogs. The dim brown tinge of the melancholy landscape was saddened still more by the dark and lowering atmosphere; not a hill was to be seen, and not a tree; nothing but a dark and dreary waste bordered on either side by a heavy mist and a threatening sky.

I was on my way to Storport, and in spite of various misadventures by land and sea, I had so far managed to retain my ardent desire to try life in the wilds of Connaught. But I had not been many hours in Ballyferry, the nearest point attainable by rail, and fifty long miles from my destination, when my ardour was considerably damped by the dreary prognostics of O'Shaughnessy, the innkeeper, and his ragged retinue. Even the driver of the car seemed to be affected while under his master's eye; but directly we turned the corner which shut the hotel from sight, his spirits rose considerably. He cracked his whip, shouted, whistled, yelled, and we sped along merrily—soon to be joined by an excited Irishman, dressed in a blue bob-tail coat with brass buttons, knee breeches,

and a brimless chimney-pot hat, who was smoking a very dirty, short pipe, and seated on the back of a donkey. An exciting race ensued. My driver cracked his whip, and whistled; the Irishman brandished his shillelagh and shouted and screamed at the top of his voice, and we rattled along in a perfect shower of mud and rain. The little donkey kept up bravely, and once or twice was on the point of leaving us behind altogether. But at last, after a short but sharp ride, Pat disappeared, with a defiant wave of the shillelagh, down an adjoining road.

After this little distraction, the drive became more and more dreary and uninteresting; the thick mist shut out any view I might have had of the surrounding country; the driver seemed to lose all his spirits, though he still endeavoured in a moody way to urge the horses on. Hoping to put a little life into him, I handed him a drink from my flask, and told him to take it easy, as the horses were perhaps rather tired after their late race, but he had evidently no intention of letting them 'take it easy,' for he whipped and shouted louder than ever; then he turned to me and breathlessly exclaimed,—

'Faith, sor, the lazy beasts must make better speed than they're doing, or we'll never reach the river before night.'

'Well, suppose we don't, it's not such a dreadful place, I suppose?'

'Troth, it is though,' he answered emphatically; 'the river is tidal, and when it is swollen with the rain, the current is strong enough to sweep the horses off their legs. It's a dangerous place; steep hills on both sides, and a rough, broken road; one false step would maybe lead to your death. Did your honor not hear about it in Ballyferry?'

'Not a word.* Have you ever crossed it before?'

'Only once, your honor. I was taking some young colleens across—it was these ponies I had; when we got into the water, one of the traces broke, and the whole weight fell on the ne pony. It was a mercy she

was a quiet and strong beast, and she managed to carry us through. It had been a dry season, and the water was low, and the tide was out, or, Lord, I think we should have been killed, for the poor beast could never have stood against the current with such a load on her back.'

'And do you think it is much swollen to day?'

'Faith, I do then, for not one dry day have we seen for eight weeks; but we'll just stop here and ask about it from a man I know.'

Suiting the action to the word, he accordingly pulled up before a little thatched cottage which stood on the roadside, and called out some mystical sentence in Irish. After this had been repeated once or twice, a queer, smoke-dried looking old man made his appearance, and answered in the same unknown tongue. A conversation thereupon ensued, which, to judge from the despairing looks of the driver, was scarcely of an agreeable nature. At last he explained to me that things looked as black as they could possibly be; the tide was in, the river was dreadfully swollen by the recent rain, and we would most probably not be able to cross before midnight, when the tide would be out. On hearing all this, I decided to go on and reconnoitre, as we might after all be able to get through, and if the worst came we must just camp on the banks until daybreak. So after again receiving the cheering information, 'It's to a wild country your honor's goin',' I once more sped on my way.

As the weather still showed no signs of clearing, I rolled myself comfortably in my rugs, and prepared to take a slight doze; but just as I was dropping into a quiet sleep, I was suddenly called back to this fretful world by a frightful babble of voices, and the car coming to a full stop. On looking up to ascertain the cause of the delay, I saw that I was close to the banks of a stream which rushed down with great force between two steep hills. On the opposite bank stood half-a-dozen ragged-looking Irishmen, wildly gesticulating and shouting out unintelligible words which were almost drowned in

the roar of the waters. I looked around to the driver for an explanation, but he had disappeared from the box, and was down at the water's edge answering his Irish friends in their own wild way. My first fears were at once confirmed; this, then, was the river. But how were we to cross it? It was so swollen by the continual rain and the full tide, that it seemed simply impossible for the horses to get through. With a quickly beating heart, I anxiously watched the faces of the men as they carried on their excited conversation. Then one of them commenced to sound the passage, by sticking in a long stick. This proceeding was not of the slightest use, apparently, as he could not reach half a yard beyond the bank, but it evidently satisfied his companions, and after a little more shouting and waving, the driver returned and announced his intention of crossing.

'The boys think we had better make a dash at it,' he said, 'and we'll maybe come through safe—for if we wait for days we'll never have a better chance.'

'But do you think these men are to be trusted?' I asked.

'Faith, are they no, sir,' he answered indignantly; 'they've all the O'Donnell blood in their veins, and if I bade them lift the ponies and *carry* them over, they'd never refuse.'

Silenced at once by this proof of clannish fidelity, I allowed him to prepare the car, and when all was ready, I screwed up my courage to the highest pitch, and bravely took my seat by his side. The horses went down the hill at a spanking rate, and so steep was the descent, that once or twice I felt that the car would certainly be overturned; but the roughness of the road acted as a sort of drag, and saved us from any catastrophe.

Then we entered the river! such a splashing, jolting, and shouting was never heard! Only the horses' backs were above water, and the car was half buried. However, they brought us safely through, galloped furiously up the steep ascent beyond, never once pausing until

they stood panting and steaming on the top of the hill. I glanced back and shuddered at the ugly place through which I had come, then I inquired how far it was to Storport.

‘Ten miles,’ was the quiet reply; ‘but there is a little shebeen close by where we will take a rest.’

The shebeen referred to was a tiny thatched hut standing in the roadside bog. When I first entered the room, the turf smoke was so thick that I could see nothing; but after a few moments my eyes grew more accustomed to it, and I could discern the bright flames of a fire which was burning in the middle of the floor, the smoke issuing through a hole in the roof. Over the fire was a large, black cauldron suspended from a thick, black iron chain which hung from the rafters; and around it sat on their hams several old women with their elbows on their knees, all smoking short clay pipes very black with age, and chattering away in Irish. The whole scene forcibly reminded me of the ‘Witch scene’ in ‘Macbeth,’ only the cauldron, instead of containing mystic ingredients, was filled with substantial potatoes. The floor of the other half of the room was strewn with straw, on which reposed two pigs, a sheep, a horse, and any number of hens.

I speedily escaped into the fresh air to examine the state of the weather and the country.

The thin misty rain still fell, but the lowering sky had begun to brighten and to show signs of clear weather coming. The landscape was of the same flat and boggy description as it had been throughout the journey; nothing to enliven the scene; not even a stone wall to vary the monotony of the desert land—all was dull, flat, and unprofitable. The very road was almost a bog, so sodden was it by the continual rain; and outside the door of the hut the pigs and ducks were waddling in the mire. The prospect so damped my spirits, that I hailed with joy the appearance of the horses. They were led by an old man, dressed in the usual bobtail coat and brimless hat, who addressed me with a queer mixture of dignity and respect.

‘You’re going to Storport, sir?’ he said, touching his brimless hat in a stately military manner.

‘Yes.’

‘It’s a wild country, sir!’

I turned my eyes on the surrounding prospect.

‘If it’s wilder than this,’ I involuntarily exclaimed, ‘it must be wild indeed.’

‘You see, sir,’ he continued, ‘here we lie snug and low, and the wind can’t very well get at us, but, in troth, sir, at Storport—’

I heard no more, for driven to desperation by the reiteration of these dreary prophecies, I jumped on to the car and drove away.

The dismal vapours gradually cleared off, and ere long we got a peep of sunshine. The land was less barren, and here and there it was relieved by pastures and grassy hillocks. As we rolled along the hillocks gradually disappeared, and were replaced by heathery mountains. At last I was aroused by the joyful words,—

‘This is Storport, sir;’ and I caught my first sight of the little village.

One glance convinced me that Storport had been libelled by my roadside informants. The bad effects of the dreary prophecies which I had heard vanished from my mind as I beheld the quiet little haven of beauty which opened out before my delighted gaze.

The car had come to a standstill on the top of the hill. I turned to the man, and asked if we had many miles further to go.

‘Sorra mile, or half a mile either,’ was the reply.

‘Can you see the house then?’

‘I cannot, yer honor, but I can see the chimbleys of it! See there, sir,’ he added, pointing to a clump of trees, from the midst of which streaks of smoke were issuing, ‘*that* is Ballyshanrany!’

‘Point me out the nearest route to the house,’ I said to the driver. ‘I’ll finish the journey on foot.’

I leapt from the car as I spoke, and, having ordered him to follow with my luggage, I took a path which he

pointed out to me across the bog. It was certainly a very short cut ; a walk of ten minutes brought me to the road again, and I found myself standing close to an iron gate, the private entrance to the grounds.

I had raised my hand to open the gate, when the silence all around me was suddenly broken by a silvery peal of laughter. I waited till it ceased, then I laid my hand upon the gate, which swung back noiselessly upon its hinges, and entered the grounds.

I could see nothing, for tall trees rose on either side, and the broad carriage drive, which I trod, took a sudden and sharp curve ; the house was completely hidden ; I walked quietly on ; then I turned the curve, and came in full view of the dwelling.

The house, a plain, two-storied building, built of stone quarried from the bog, and roofed with slate, was almost buried in a profusion of ivy and flowers ; all the windows and doors stood open, and around them clustered roses and fuchsias in full bloom. Before the front door was a rather neglected-looking lawn, gazing beyond which one beheld the blue of the open sea. The front door stood wide open, and on the threshold was spread a couple of bearskin rugs, seated on which, amidst the wealth of snow-white hair, was a little girl about five or six years old. She sat cross-legged, facing a number of dogs, which clustered eagerly before her,—dogs of all sizes and conditions, from one huge St Bernard down to the veriest mite of a terrier that ever worried at the life of a rat. It was the laughter of this little witch which had already reached me ; she was putting some of the dogs through their tricks, and every time they made a mistake she clapped her hands and laughed aloud.

‘Cousin number one!’ I commented mentally, drawing back in the shelter of the trees, and gazing with amused eyes upon the child. I remembered, as I did so, the blot and the cross which had disfigured my much-prized letter, and having decided this little one’s identity, I looked around for cousin number two.

I had not far to look.

A few yards from the door stood a small wicker table, strewn with powder, shot, wads, cartridge cases, etc., and at this table sat a young girl busily at work making cartridges. Again I mentally referred to my letter, and after having done so, I had little difficulty in recognising my cousin Bridget. She was certainly not so pretty as little Amy, who, with her warm brown skin, her sparkling black eyes and glossy hair, would have made a model which any painter might have been proud of. Still Bridget was not at all bad looking, and if she had been seen alone and not by the side of her little witch of a sister, she would have certainly demanded a second glance. But she had disadvantages to contend against, which had not yet come Amy's way. She was at that age when the figure has taken no definite form, when the arms and legs appear too long and dresses can never be made to fit; nevertheless, she had laughing blue eyes and a pleasant face, which she had contrived to disfigure by cropping off all her hair. Yes, I instinctively felt that in Bridget I had not discovered the beauty of the family, but I had quite made up my mind that we should be excellent friends.

Then I took another peep.

This time I was disappointed.

I was about to move forward, and boldly proclaim my presence, when my eye fell upon a sight which held me captive.

Not very far from the table at which Biddy was so busily engaged, was a hammock swung up to the branches of two saplings, and in the hammock, lying at full length, with her head supported on her two clasped hands, was another of my Connaught cousins.

About seventeen years of age, tall and thin, with a skin like alabaster, and hair of rich warm gold. She was dressed in a robe of white, which was daintily trimmed with lace, and here and there a knot of rose-coloured ribbon. Through the open work of the sleeves and bodice, you could see the warm tints of arms and

neck. Her golden hair fell loosely on her shoulders, while her eyes gazed dreamily to the cloudy sky above. At last I had certainly come upon the beauty of the family; for no maiden, however fair, could be more charming.

For a moment I stood gazing as if spell-bound, then I resolutely walked forward, and in one word made myself known.

Heavens ! what a change !

Amy leaped up from her rug. Biddy from her table, and Oona—as I heard the others call the beautiful dreamer—slipt quietly from her hammock, and came forward smiling with the rest !

There was a moment, just a moment of confused silence, then a wild cry of—

‘Kate, Kate, do come out ! Here’s cousin Jack !’

What happened after that I don’t exactly know, but I was conscious of the presence of a somewhat buxom young woman of twenty, who stood in the doorway, addressed me as ‘Cousin Jack,’ and offered me her hand to shake and her cheek to kiss. Afterwards, using a cousin’s privilege, I proceeded to kiss a few more cheeks, amongst which was the pretty pink and white one belonging to Oona, who, having recovered from her first start of surprise at my presence, accepted my salute with all the frankness of a child. To what length my ardour would have gone I am not prepared to say. I felt quite willing, however, to kiss them all round again, if necessary, but my good intentions were summarily interrupted by the arrival of the car which I had deserted on the road, and which now appeared with my luggage.

More confusion, more delighted laughter, and more words of welcome ! At a summons from Kate there appeared upon the scene a couple of neatly-dressed servant-maids and a wild-looking Connaught boy ; one and all chattered to the driver in their unearthly tongue, while they possessed themselves of my goods.

It must not be supposed that the girls were idle. Kate—calm, self-possessed Kate, who had evidently been

disturbed at her housekeeping—superintended the removal of my luggage, and gave her orders about it in the Irish language. Biddy was carrying in my fishing-rod, and a few loose parcels which were on the car. Oona was lifting down, with very tender hands, my strap full of books, while Amy, after having with a great deal of trouble silenced her yelping canine family, was staggering in beneath the weight of my ulster.

It was certainly a new experience to me, but by no means an unpleasant one. Had I been more accustomed to female society, and kept my wits about me, I should never have allowed those pretty girls to turn themselves into serving-maids on my account; but the novelty of the situation perfectly took away my breath and rendered me powerless. So I stood and looked on, feeling very much like a powerful Sultan, attended by the ladies of his court.

At length the work was done. All my packages, both great and small, had been carried to my room; the horses which had brought me thither had been led away to the stables, where they were to pass the night; and I stood in the spacious hall surrounded by the girls.

‘So you are my Connaught cousins?’ I said, looking at the cluster of up-turned faces. ‘I must say, my dears, you are excessively jolly girls! But I understood there were six of you! where are the missing two?’

‘Nora and Aileen,’ said Kate, smiling, ‘are out riding, and papa has driven over to the moor, but,’ she added, glancing at the face of a very old-fashioned clock which stood in the hall, ‘he’ll be in to dinner in less than half-an-hour,—and won’t he be astonished to find you here!’

‘Will he?’

‘Why, of course he will; do you suppose, if you had written to say you were coming, we should have allowed you to arrive like this? I had arranged to send the car over to Ballyferry for you; it would have stayed there all night, and brought you back the next day. Papa, Aileen, and Nora were to ride as far as Glenderig to have taken

you some lunch, which you could have eaten there, and escorted you back. And to think that, after all, you should take us by surprise !'

I explained to Kate that I *had* written, fixing not only the day, but the hour of my arrival at Ballyshanrany. Kathleen did not seem the least astonished, but she looked rather more annoyed.

'It's that Mickie the post !' she said. 'Sure it's time the work was taken away from him altogether, for he gets worse and worse. He hasn't brought me a letter for the last year that wasn't a month old at least. Last night he didn't deliver the letters at all. Shawn saw him at old Cormic's wake. Oh, cousin Jack, what inhospitable people you must have thought us to be sure !'

I laughingly dispelled her fears, and in order to make things comfortable amongst us, I volunteered to say 'How do you do ?' all round again ; the girls responded with heartiness to my offer of shaking hands ; when I offered to repeat my osculatory performance they laughingly drew back.

'Well !' I exclaimed, 'I must hold to what I said just now. You are certainly nice girls — nobody would attempt to deny it—but you are not girls of your word. Wouldn't you let your father kiss you ?'

'Of course we would.'

'And did you not promise in your letter to treat me like papa ?'

'Ah ! yes,' said Kate bluntly ; 'but then we hadn't seen you, and we thought you were more like him.'

'Indeed, and what made you think I was like him ?'

'Well, you are a barrister, you know, and we had decided amongst ourselves that all barristers must be old-fashioned, whereas you are quite young and—and—'

'And very handsome,' added Amy candidly. 'I'll kiss you, cousin Jack.'

All the girls laughed, and said Amy's conduct was shameless, while I lifted her on to a chair and kissed her brown cheek not once but half-a-dozen times, after which she generously volunteered to conduct me to my rooms.

CHAPTER III.

THE lodge, though by no means palatial-looking from the outside, must have been decidedly roomy within, since Kate had been able to set aside two very comfortable chambers for my sole and special use. The first room which I entered was a bedroom, furnished and fitted in a manner to suit the taste of the most fastidious of men. Everything was bright, clean, pleasant, and significant of a woman's careful hand. There were pretty lace draperies at the window, and snow-white hangings to the bed, freshly-plucked flowers on the dressing-table, while around the open casement clustered full-blown roses and fuchsias, the scent of which filled the room. On putting my head out of the window and looking down, I saw Oona's hammock, containing now only a half-open book, Biddy's table covered with half-made cartridges, and one or two of Amy's dogs. Looking straight forward, I beheld a boundless expanse of sea.

Having finished my survey of the bed-chamber, I passed on into the tiny room adjoining, which was evidently intended for my private sitting-room or study. There was no sign of the dressing-room about it, and the efforts of the girls had evidently been exerted to make it as great a contrast as possible to the dimity whiteness of my sleeping-chamber.

It was the smallest and cosiest of rooms. A comfortable carpet covered the floor; the furniture was of plain oak, but there was a sofa and easy-chair; on the mantel-piece, besides a brazen timepiece, was a jar full of bird's-eye tobacco and a box of cigars; and on the table, which was covered with a neat table-cloth, were a number of books. I glanced at the books, which had doubtless been selected for my special reading, and found them to consist of a New Testament, a guide-book to Connemara, Lord Byron's Poems (expurgated family edition, with Oona's name written on the fly-leaf), and an Irish treatise

on fly-fishing. Nor was this all. Close to the window stood a pretty mahogany writing-desk, where I found stationery, ink, pens, stamps, and even sheets of folios for scribbling, and a bronze reading-lamp. There were more flowers here, both in the room and clustering outside the window, while the green trailing creepers contrasted pleasantly with the warm red curtains within.

‘My lines have fallen in pleasant places,’ I said, casting a last look around. Then remembering Kate’s words, ‘In half-an-hour papa will be in to dinner,’ I deemed the best thing I could do would be to put myself in order for the family meal.

I re-entered my bedroom, laid out my things, pulled off my coat, and unbuttoned my collar, when my operations were suddenly stopped,—for the sounds which issued from below announced the arrival of the missing members of the family.

I looked out.

First a couple of horses cantered up the gravel walk, and paused before the hall-door, then I heard the rattling of carriage wheels, after which a hearty voice exclaimed,—

‘What! you don’t mean to say he’s arrived, Kate? God bless my soul! where is he?’

A minute afterwards I heard a good sound rap at my door, and, on opening it, I beheld my uncle.

One glance, and my heart went out to him; he was a man whom nobody could dislike. He was adored by all his tenantry, and idolised by his girls. Now, for the first time, I could understand why my mother’s petted sister had been induced to marry a man just twice her age. I could understand also the unaffected candour of the girls. Kenmare was a gentleman from head to foot, but there was no vestige in him of self-consciousness or affectation. He was over sixty years of age, tall, broad-shouldered, and firmly built; his hair and beard were of a pure iron grey, and his face, though bronzed and wrinkled, was handsome still. He was dressed in an old suit of nondescript brown, and the brown leggings,

which reached to his knèes, were covered with bog-mire. He had removed his billycock hat, and the perspiration stood in beads upon his brow. But his face lit up into a bright smile when he looked at me.

‘Well, my boy,’ he said, ‘sure I am heartily glad to see you, and I hope, now you *have* come, you mean to make a long stay. Will you join me in a glass of grog? or has Kate given you too much already?’

I confessed that since my arrival I had had nothing, and added hastily that I was not in need of anything; but my uncle was not to be put off.

‘Nonsense, my boy!’ he exclaimed; ‘after a journey like that any man would want a glass, so you’ll just come down with me. I always take half a glass when I come in from shooting. It keeps out the cold, and gives me an appetite for dinner. You haven’t got your coat on? Never mind—this is Liberty Hall!’

So saying, and in spite of my remonstrances, he took me downstairs and marshalled me into a room where two young ladies were sitting, clad in riding-habits, with their round felt riding-hats pushed back on their heads. My uncle introduced the young ladies as ‘Alley’ and ‘Nora,’ and disposed of me as their ‘Cousin Jack.’ The girls looked up, stared, and laughed, then they rose, shook hands with me, and made off to dress for dinner. Kenmare turned to the waiting-maid, who was bringing in the cold water for his grog,—

‘A glass for my nephew, Mary, my dear,’ he said; ‘and when you’re back in the kitchen, tell that spalpeen Shawn to wake himself up a bit, for there’s a new master for him at the lodge. Sure he’s a lazy loon, but he knows his way about, and I mean him to look after Mr Stedman!’

Then his eye fell upon Kate, who was passing on her way to the dining-room, and he exclaimed,—

‘Oh, Kate, Kate, where is all your Irish hospitality?’

‘Sure, papa,’ returned Kate, blushing and laughing, ‘it is not my fault. He arrived so suddenly; he took us all so much by surprise, that I completely forgot he might be thirsty!’

Having disposed of my grog, I was allowed to go to my room again, receiving this time special orders to dress quickly, for the dinner would not be long.

My first care was to stand before the glass and examine myself critically. As I did so, I called up the imaginary picture which the girls had drawn of me, and understood the startled look of surprise which had come into their eyes, as they had rested the first time upon me.

‘Middle-aged and old-fashioned!’ I was certainly neither. I was tall and slim, and despite my thirty years, my worst enemy could not have accused me of looking more than twenty-five. Perhaps this last fact was owing to the lack of hair on my face, for beyond a slight moustache which shaded my upper lip, I had none.

Having examined myself, and feeling rather pleased with the result, I turned from the glass and hurried on with my operations for dressing. I had brought a few suits with me, but they had been selected more with a view to sport than ladies’ society. True, I had been perfectly aware that I was about to be introduced into the society of half-a-dozen girls, but I had not thought the whole of them worth the carriage of a suit of dress clothes. As I acknowledged this, and remembered how well a suit of dress clothes became me, I continued my dressing in anything but a contented frame of mind.

I had finished, and was about to take another survey of myself in the glass, when a gong sounded loudly. I hastily descended the stairs, crossed the hall, and entered the dining-room.

I was the last to arrive.

There was my uncle, habited now in a suit of dark tweed, with spotless linen, which showed off to perfection his bronzed cheeks and iron-grey hair; and there were the girls, all six of them, looking as fresh as new-blown roses, all nicely dressed in delicate whites and creams and pinks, and presenting as pretty a picture as one could hope to see on a summer’s day.

The only bit of shade was introduced by Kate, and

she, being the oldest, and, as it were, the matron of the family, had thought it consistent with her matronly dignity to wear shades of a sombre hue. She was dressed that night in a costume of soft black lace, with slashings of amber, and she carried a couple of pale yellow roses at her throat and in her black hair.

The dinner passed off merrily. We were waited upon by the couple of neat Irish colleens who had carried in my luggage. Both the food and the drink were good. My uncle kept us amused with some good stories; and the girls had learnt the difficult lesson of not to expect a lot of foolish attentions from a man when he's tired and hungry. They talked to their father and to each other; but for the time being they were generous enough to let me alone.

During the dinner I felt grateful enough for their consideration; but after the inner man was refreshed, and when all the girls had retired to the drawing-room, it was another matter. Then I began to long for their society; so, presently seeing that my uncle was growing sleepy over his grog, I proposed that we should 'join the ladies.' Nothing loath, he rose, and we repaired to the drawing-room together.

All the girls were there, and most of them were occupied; but the one who attracted the most of my attention was Amy. She sat on the hearth, just as I had seen her sitting on the door-step, surrounded and almost smothered by that strange collection of dogs. The tiniest mite of the collection, a shaggy little terrier, was curled up in her lap; while the sole desire of the others seemed to be to touch some part of her pretty little body. They rested their heads on her shoulder, they poked their cold noses into her little hands, they sniffed about her hair, they leisurely licked her brown cheek.

I took my seat with the party, and by dint of a few well-applied questions, managed to make myself tolerably well acquainted with one and all.

Thus I learned that Kate was not only the good fairy at home, but in the village; that she helped the needy

and cured the sick, taking very often the place of the doctor, who had a strong liking for whisky, and consequently was not always equal to the demands made upon him. But what did the villagers care? They knew that at the lodge there was a medicine chest as good or better than any in the doctor's surgery; that at any hour, both day and night, Kate was ready to answer the call of the sick; that for the performance of operations which were well within her knowledge, her hand was as sure as the doctor's; and most important of all, that she always carried a basket well filled with dainties for the patient to eat. Consequently Kate's hands were always pretty full. Sometimes the sick were brought to the lodge and treated in the room known as 'Kate's Surgery,' but when they were too ill to be removed she went to them.

Aileen and Nora had a passion for riding, and spent a good deal of their time on the backs of a couple of country hacks which their father had given them. In this way they managed to render some valuable assistance to Kate. In the course of a morning's ride they could visit half-a-dozen patients, and report progress; they had also a couple of capacious saddle bags which Kate could fill. Besides this, Aileen was fond of a good day's fishing, and there wasn't a boy in Connaught could beat her at tying a fly.

As for Oona, I found at once she was a dreamer, and lived in a world of her own. She was fond of roaming about the village alone, of visiting spots made interesting in her eyes by their connection with legends and fairy tales. After having listened with breathless interest to the tales told by the old cauliaghs of the village, she would return to her home to lie in her hammock, and dream. She had also a tiny study at the top of the house, I was told, where she sometimes sat to write out the poems and romances, which she hoped some day to be able to give to the world. When quite a little child, and up to the age of fourteen, she had been a zealous contributor to *Little Folk's Magazine*, and for certain

stories published therein she had received a couple of silver medals and a beautifully bound volume of *Æsop's Fables*. I was promised a sight of these treasures, then hidden in the study.

Biddy and Amy, the youngest of this girl-garland, were supposed not to have formed any particular tastes at all. Biddy's chief occupation seemed to be to look after her father's fishing tackle and cartridges, while Amy they thought might turn out to be a clever musician, since at the early age of six she had actually composed an Irish jig. When I expressed my amazement that the child should surround herself by all the dogs that chose to hang about the establishment, I was informed that the creatures were Amy's special pride, and that the whole family belonged solely to her, since they had been given to her by friends on her birthdays.

'They discovered somehow that she had a liking for pets,' said Kate, 'and so as every birthday came round, two or three were sure to arrive. Papa is answerable for it; it was he who first developed her liking for dogs. He gave her Nero when she was only a year old, and he has watched over her ever since. Amy, you ought to introduce Nero to cousin Jack.'

'Where is he?' said Amy, looking round; and she called his name.

At first the call produced no result. The little terriers of the family frisked about and wagged their tails, and the white Gordon setter turned his eye sleepily upon Amy and yawned. Upon the call being twice repeated, however, the drawing-room door opened, and there stalked majestically in a handsome, black, curly-coated retriever. He looked neither to the right nor the left, but walked quietly forward to where his little mistress sat, paused before her, and gazed inquiringly into her face. She took his head between her hands, and bestowed two or three fond kisses upon his coal-black nose. He sneezed violently, shook his head, looked very much disgusted, but made no attempt to move. Amy laughed delightedly.

‘He *hates* being kissed,’ she cried; ‘he can’t bear me to love him. Oh, you dear, disagreeable old Nero, go and say “How do you do?” to cousin Jack!’

He turned his eye towards me; after a moment’s hesitation he walked quietly over to where I sat, looked at me critically for a moment, then graciously lifted his paw.

‘Shake hands!’ screamed Amy enthusiastically. ‘Sure you must shake hands at once, for it’s a sign he likes you. Papa, papa, just look at Nero giving a welcome to cousin Jack!’

‘He’s a nice dog, isn’t he?’ said Kate, when the ceremony of shaking hands was over; ‘and he’s a good dog too. He once saved Amy’s life!’

‘Indeed!’

‘Yes; about two years ago the nurse, unknown to me, took Amy and Nero with her, and went out for a sail on the sea. A squall capsized the boat not far from land; both the nurse and the boy who was sailing the boat were drowned, but old Nero swam to shore with Amy in his mouth.’

‘By Jove!’ I cried; ‘he’s a fine fellow!’

‘And, will you believe it, ever since that day he has never allowed her to go out without him. If she attempted to shut him up he’d tear the house down. One day he was shut in Oona’s room for safety. Amy had gone with some of the girls to a wedding in Father John’s chapel on the other side of the Ferry. In the middle of the ceremony the company were startled by the sudden appearance of Nero—dripping from his swim across the estuary, and with a cut and bleeding nose. He had broken the glass and leapt out of the window, and tracked her there!’

I turned to Nero, who still stood looking critically at me. He answered my look by leisurely wagging his tail. I patted his head approvingly, and I certainly felt glad that he should have deemed it worth his while to give me a special welcome to Ballyshanrany.

CHAPTER IV.

It is now four weeks since I arrived at Storport, and already the old life in London seems like a half-forgotten dream. Jack Briefless is transformed into Jack Viator. I am a full-blossomed sportsman, fisherman, boatsman ; in fact, a regular Connaught man. I can drink whisky neat, and I have learned to love the taste of potheen. I know almost every man, woman, and child in the place. I have gone salmon-fishing with the clergyman, and coursing with the priest. Over and above all this, is my Sultan-like position in the house. The girls adore me, and I adore the girls.

As to my uncle, he is the prince of good fellows. His horses, his dogs, his carriages, his daughters, and his servants are all at my disposal. But no one bothers me. I come and go just as I please. Every day I can make my own programme. If I want to go shooting, dogs and guns are ready. If I prefer to stay at home loafing, the girls have a thousand devices to amuse me. It is a lazy life and a merry ; my only fear is that it will utterly spoil me for civilisation.

The good fairies of the lodge have given me an attendant Gnome, who is at my beck and call whenever I choose to rub the magic ring if I fancy, and summon him to wait upon me.

His name is Shawn na Chauliagh, or John of the Ferry, so called because he is one of the large family reared by the ferryman who plays Charon between Storport and the neighbouring islands. He stands six feet high in his brogues, has hair of wondrous redness, and a face stained mahogany-brown with wind and weather ; is twenty-five years old ; can tie a fly and cast a line ; can walk from the lodge door to the highest mountain without pausing for breath ; knows every corner of the moors and every pool of the waters, and is a prime favourite with both the gentry and the tenantry. The district is proclaimed, and

is entirely given over to the landlord shooters ; but wherever I go I know I am safe with Shawn.

Two or three mornings after my arrival, my attendant spirit made his first appearance.

I was standing at the lodge door with my uncle, preparatory to mounting the car and being driven over to the Owennuff (ten miles off) for a day's fishing, when there appeared before us a tall, powerful figure with a fishing-basket on his back, a staff in his hand, thick brogues, tattered trousers rolled up to the knee, showing a bare pair of herculean legs.

'Shawn, ye rogue,' said my uncle, 'are you ready?'

'I am, yer honor,' replied the giant.

'Have you the lunch in your basket, and the whisky?'

'Yes, your honor.'

'This is my nephew, Mr Jack. So long as he remains here he's your master, remember ;—you'll take good care of him and show him the best sport in the country. Do you mind, now?'

Shawn smiled and nodded, and then, in Connaught fashion, held out his hand, which I took and pressed. At that moment the car came round. I jumped up by the driver in front, Shawn mounted behind, and away we drove, while my uncle cried 'good luck' to us, and waved his hat from the house-door.

Shawn was very reticent that day. I fell a little in his estimation when, by terrible bungling, I lost my first salmon. But he soon made up his mind that I, although nominally his master, was a sort of a helpless lunatic, to whom he was to act as a temporary keeper and protector. When I hesitated about crossing from one part of the river to another, he quietly took me on his back, and strode across with me, wading waist deep. He showed me how to throw a fly properly, and when my arms grew tired, which they did very quickly, he took the rod and fished the waters leisurely himself.

His opinion of me sank for a moment when he saw me dilute my whisky with water, but it rose again rapidly when he found that I drank very little of the spirit, and

gave him as his portion more than two-thirds of my uncle's large flask.

From that day forward we became firm friends and allies.

Some of Shawn's sayings and doings are memorable for their oddity. The other day, as we were trudging over the moor in search of the snipe, which were just beginning to arrive, driven hither by the first white frost, we saw, quietly contemplating us from an adjacent knoll, the head of a donkey.

The sight encouraged me to a foolish joke.

'Look there, Shawn!' I exclaimed, 'isn't that the *Diaoul*?'

The *Diaoul* is Connaught for the name of his Satanic Majesty. Shawn did not smile; indeed, his countenance seldom or never relaxed from its friendly solemnity, but with the quiet yet respectful air of superior knowledge peculiar to him, he proceeded to correct me.

'Indeed then, your honor,' he replied, 'it is *not*!'

Then, meeting my look of inquiry, he calmly continued,—

'Sure there are two things the *Diaoul* can never put hisself into. It's aisy enough for the *Diaoul* to put hisself into a sheep, or a dog, or a bull, or a sealgh, or a crane, or a wild goose, your honor; but sorra a man living ever saw him like a donkey, or like a pig!'

We walked slowly on; after a few minutes Shawn observed thoughtfully,—

'They're saying, your honor, that pigs can *see the wind*!'

'Indeed!' I exclaimed.

'And that it's of a *red* colour!'

'Is that so, Shawn?' I exclaimed, laughing; 'then, if only pigs are gifted enough to perceive it, one of them must have been your authority.'

Shawn didn't seem to understand me, but strode on in a dark reverie, surprised that I should treat so solemn a subject with anything like levity.

It would be in vain to deny the fact that Shawn's

weakness is a love for distilled spirits, and I am afraid that my companionship has not helped to reform him. This reminds me that my cousin Kathleen, who is a zealous abstainer, and does a good deal of teetotal work in the village, has been trying for a long time to get Shawn to sign the pledge;—just before my arrival she almost succeeded.

After having disappeared for two or three days, and returned with all the signs upon him of a heavy carouse, Shawn appeared, penitent and crestfallen, at the lodge. He was no longer refractory; he was quite ready to sign the pledge. Delighted at this conversion, Kate led him into the little parlour which she used as housekeeper's room, produced pen and ink, and the usual teetotal card for Shawn's signature.

'I'm so glad, Shawn,' she said, 'that you mean to reform. Drinking is so wicked, so very wicked!'

'Indeed, then, Miss Kathleen, it *is*!'

'And when you've made up your mind to give it up altogether, you'll be so much happier in your mind!'

'Indeed, then, Miss Kathleen, that's true!'

'Put your mark there, where I have put your name,—John O'Donnell!'

Shawn hesitated a moment, scratching his head, then took the pen, and with infinite trouble, holding his head sideways, and lolling out his tongue like a school-boy, contrived to make his mark; the mark made, he looked at it proudly, then turning to his young mistress with a smile which was a strange compound of shyness, simplicity, and self-satisfaction, he exclaimed,—

'And *now*, Miss Kathleen, you'll shust fetch out the bottle, *and give me one glass*!'

Even after that exhibition of Shawn's complicated perception of the nature of an oath, my cousin did not let him escape her. She lectured him soundly, and at last convinced him that he stood pledged not to touch a drop of anything, unless (here, alas! Kate added a fatal corollary) he was dangerously ill, and absolutely needed the spirit as a medicine.

The next day Shawn was taken alarmingly bad 'with the colic,' and messengers came flying up to the lodge to beg 'a little drop of whisky, for the love of God.' My uncle, who was at home alone, sent down the physic. From that day forth, until Kathleen indignantly released him from his promise, Shawn's health was a subject of considerable alarm to his relatives, his internal attacks occurring with strange frequency, and yielding to no medicine but one.

So much for Shawn's addiction to the bottle. While admitting his infirmity, I must do him the justice to say that I have never seen him drunk, or stupidly intoxicated; it would take a large quantity, indeed, to affect his seasoned carcase!

And let me admit, moreover, that he is no worse than his betters. Everybody loves whisky in this district. My own uncle can take his glass freely. His neighbours and his servants are free drinkers. The priest, Father John Murphy, would have been a bishop long ago (I have it on his own authority) but for the bottle, and his curate, Father Tim Doolan, has twice been suspended. The doctor, an M.D. of Dublin, is seldom or never sober.

This reminds me that shortly after my arrival I heard great accounts of the priest's conversational powers and the doctor's joviality. 'They were characters,' my uncle said, 'to be studied and enjoyed,' and he told me a dozen merry stories concerning them.

They called one morning together, and sadly disappointed me, for neither had a word to say for himself. Father John, a powerfully-built man of five-and-forty, with a coal black coat and a rubicund complexion, was the picture of melancholy. Dr Maguire, a little, round man, with bristling black hair, dressed in a rough tweed suit, and carrying a heavy walking-stick, looked fit for a funeral.

No sooner were they seated in the parlour than my uncle brought out the bottle and glasses.

'Not for me, Mr Kenmare,' said Maguire gloomily; 'I'm not tasting.' And he explained that he had taken the pledge for a month.

My uncle turned to Father John, who put up his hand and shook his head.

‘Nor myself neither!’ he exclaimed. ‘It’s the bishop has made me promise not to take a glass till next confirmation.’

My uncle did not press them, but put the materials down upon the table midway between them. Then I, to whom they had just been introduced, tried to draw them into conversation. Impossible. They sat like martyred men, lugubrious, monosyllabic. Where were their jovial ways, their jests, their wreathed smiles? Gone; and as for the country, the weather, the people, they hadn’t a good word to say of any of them. It was a miserable world.

Presently my uncle was called out of the room by one of the girls. Slightly embarrassed by my strange company, I walked over to the window and looked out. Then I heard the following conversation carried on by the two worthies, whom, slightly turning, I watched out of the corner of my eye:—

‘Father John, sir, you’re looking mighty pale!’

‘No paler than yourself, doctor; I’m grieved to see *you* looking so bad.’

A pause. Each fidgeted, and cast a sly glance at the bottle.

‘Is it the green sickness that’s on ye, doctor? Holy saints, take care of your health!’

‘It’s a bad cold I have got, Father John. But look after yourself, for I’m in dread the fever is coming on ye!’

‘What’s good for that, doctor?’

‘A glass of Jamieson, or maybe two glasses.’

‘And for your own green sickness, doctor? I’m asking ye as ye’re a medical man!’

‘There’s no cure but one, and sure I have taken the pledge, and can’t taste.’

Another pause. The men looked sadly at one another, and then at the bottle.

‘Father John,’ said Maguire suddenly, ‘as your medical adviser, sir, I insist on your taking a glass of Jamieson!’

‘Dr Maguire,’ cried the other, ‘I’ll not have your death on me conscience ! Take a drop of the creature to cure your sickness, and, by all the saints, I’ll *absolve* you !’

Almost simultaneously their hands were stretched out towards the bottle. The priest’s hand seized it first, and poured out two brimming measures. Each clutched a glass, and lifted it to his thirsty lips.

At that moment my uncle re-entered the room, and roared with laughter at the picture. Both men joined in the merriment. Almost instantaneously they were transformed. Jest, story, and song flowed from their magically-loosened lips. Before they left the room, Father John had sung ‘The Vale of Avoca’ in the richest Irish ; and Dr Maguire had given his famous description of how the piper of Achill was anointed, waked, and half buried when he was lying unconscious, not dead, but *dead drunk*, after Andy O’Shaughnessy’s wedding !

Such are two of the leading worthies of the place. There are others to whom I shall endeavour to introduce my reader in due course ; but these two are paramount. Both, I may observe in passing, have strong popular sympathies. Father John, at his second bottle, is easily persuaded to denounce the Saxon—in other words, he stands erect, and with many sawings of his right arm, thunders out a bloodthirsty poem contributed some years ago to the *Nation*. Maguire, at the same stage, sings ‘Rory of the Hills,’ and other Fenian ditties, with tremendous unction. Both mean no harm ; neither would hurt a fly, I am sure of that. They do these things in what may be called, referring to a certain famous discussion, a ‘Pickwickian spirit,’—it is a part of their profession, a phase of their local humour.

It is very curious to me to dwell in a district so disaffected, and to see everything so tranquil and so pleasant.

When I came over I brought a revolver with me, thinking I carried my life in my hand, but my uncle and the girls laughed outright at my fears. Yet not a mile

from their door this summer, Mr Freeland, a Scotch farmer, was shot down dead in cold blood close to the church-door; and in the thick of the fair at Westport I had pointed out to me the actual murderer of Lord Antrim. Nay, am I not on the most intimate terms with Conolly Magrath, who has the worst reputation in the whole place.

Conolly is a little, mild-spoken man, with pale blue eyes, a watery mouth, and the most amiable of tempers. To look at him, you would take him for a lamb in human form. He attends to my uncle's horses, and accompanies us sometimes on boating excursions, adores the 'young mistresses,' as he calls them, and worships my uncle, who has more than once got him out of serious trouble.

'They tell me, Conolly,' I said to him one morning, 'that you know who shot Mr Freeland?'

Conolly, who was busily rubbing up some old harness, smiled, a smile that was child-like and bland.

'Is it me, your honor? Now, who would be after telling you that same?'

'Never mind who told me; but come now, you do know something about it; don't you?'

'Sorra haporth, yer honor!' he replied, still smiling.

'Well, now, didn't you threaten Mr O'Neil of the Castle, your own landlord?'

'I did *not*, then!' was the reply; he added naively, 'I only told him the truth. I said that if he asked for the rent this year, maybe the boys would be firing a shot or two at him, for fun to themselves!'

I looked at him with grave indignation.

'It's a shocking state of things!' I cried; 'a disgrace to Ireland! Scarcely a day passes but some new outrage is reported!'

'I'm in dread; your honor,' returned Conolly, 'that it'll never stop till the boys get hold of the land their own selves!'

'And pay no rent?—ridiculous!'

'Sure, how can the poor creatures pay rent, when they've sorra penny in the world?'

I fixed my eyes upon him.

‘Don’t you think God would punish you,’ I said, ‘if you took away a precious human life?’

Conolly was not smiling now; his pale face had turned a trifle whiter, and there was a curious working about the lips.

‘I’d never do that same, your honor!’

‘I’m glad to hear you say so. *You’d* never commit murder, I am sure!’

‘Is it me, your honor? But I put it to your own self, what harm would there be for a poor boy to *kill a tyrant*?’

‘Why, that *is* murder!’ I exclaimed.

‘Is it, then, your honor?’ he replied, smilingly.

‘Sure, then, they don’t call *that* murder down here in Connaught.’

To this day I can’t quite make out whether Conolly is a rogue or simpleton. I am less decided in my opinion concerning his blood relation and great factotum, Mrs Jack Timlin, who kept the village inn.

‘Sure there’s only one man in my parish,’ said Father John one day, ‘and he’s a woman,’ referring to this same Mrs Timlin. This extraordinary person, the widow of the late lamented Jack Timlin, who got wounded in the head in the Westport riots, has more influence in the district than any other individual, rich or poor. She is said to be the head of the Ribbon conspiracy hereabouts, and it is asserted that every dark crime which has been penetrated in the neighbourhood, had been sealed and covenanted in her little parlour.

Physically, she is a tall, lean woman, with a sickly complexion, induced partly by her habit of smoking strong tobacco. She has large, bold eyes, an impudent expression, and a determined jaw. She dresses very shabbily, much like the poor people hereabouts, but wears in addition to the usual short gown and petticoat, a large widow’s cap cocked somewhat rakishly on the top of her unkempt black hair. She is said to be rich—at all events she lends money at high interest to the

country people, and woe to the man or woman, however poor, who fails to keep faith with *her* in the repayment of instalments.

Mrs Jack Timlin, though a furious Land Leaguer, would sell up and demolish Mr Parnell himself if he owed her a penny.

She is at once the terror and admiration of the district. On principle she had seldom or never paid any rent, and the landlord never thought of turning her out of her hostelry till some months ago, when, indignant and desperate, he gave her warning to quit. Being of a careful turn of mind, she at once insured the place, with all its furniture and stock, for a heavy sum. A few weeks after the insurance was effected the place was burned to the ground. It appeared on inquiry that a stupid caretaker, whom the widow had left in charge of the place while she visited some friends in Westport, had one night gone to bed in his clothes with a lighted pipe in his mouth, and awakening found the room in flames. He had then rushed out, and sat down quietly on the opposite side of the road, where the police had found him at daybreak, contemplating the blackened walls. Questioned by the constable as to why he had failed to give the alarm, he had protested he hadn't dared, for the life of him, to leave the spot,—the widow Timlin having sworn him solemnly, before she left, to '*to keep his eye upon the house ;*' which he had done accordingly, to his own perfect satisfaction, and, it is recorded, that of the widow.

These are some of the worthies of the village ; as for the village itself, and its situation, I find I have said little or nothing about them. Words are of little use to call up natural scenery : so a few rough lines of description must serve for a picture of what could only be properly reproduced by pencil or brush,

The small cluster of huts which bears the dignified title of 'The Village,' stands upon a grassy hillock, about two hundred yards from the sea-shore. A magnificent range of hills runs for miles inland and almost entirely

surrounds it. In the far distance, stretching out into the sea, and partly cutting off the sweep of the open ocean, is Erris Head.

A sandy bar, formed by the incessant washing of the sea upon the soft sand, stretches from the cliffs on either side, and forms a sort of breakwater, keeping the little bay within in a state of comparative calm; and so effectual is it, that even in the roughest winter weather, when outside the rollers and breakers are raging wildly, and the spray is dashing about the rocks and over the summits of the cliffs, the bay within is comparatively still, and one may use a small boat with perfect safety. It is impossible, however, to cross the bar until the waves have entirely subsided and sunk into a partial calm.

There are two estuaries, one on either side of the village, which extends for miles inland, winding and turning among the hills. At high tide they swell into magnificent fjords or arms of the sea, but at low water they sink into insignificant stretches of mud and rivulet, and sometimes, especially during the low spring tides, it is possible to walk across the strand dry shod.

Shawn's father is the ferryman—that is to say, he is the ferryman so called, but his duties are done by all the members of his numerous family, including any number of shock-headed gorsoons and black-eyed colleens, of all sizes and ages, and in all sorts of costumes.

The ferry-boat is an enormous structure, generally out of repair. When anyone wants to come or go across, there is no hurry. I have seen the priest myself gesticulating for a whole hour on the opposite side of the estuary, without making the slightest impression on the ferry family, who were tranquilly digging in the potato fields close by.

The ferry is, of course, a shebeeen, and potheen flows there like water. Sometimes the whole family get drunk together, and go to bed for the day.

One of Shawn's brothers, 'a little shmall boy' of twenty, big as a grenadier, carries the letters. He generally takes his own time about delivering them, and they have been

known to arrive in an advanced stage of decomposition. If anything were needed to prove that we are quite outside the pale of civilisation here in Connaught, it would be the charmingly informal method of the postal delivery.

CHAPTER V.

‘JACK, my boy,’ said my uncle one evening, ‘be ready at ten to-morrow for a sail up to Glenamoy. Charlie Bingley and Achill Murray are coming over from the castle, and we mean to have a pleasant day, please God.’

So it was settled; and while we were seated next morning at breakfast, young Bingley, in the kilt, and Murray, in a knickerbocker suit, looked in—the former a lanky hobbledohoy, much given to dark musings on the reluctant growth of his own whiskers; the latter a square-set jolly fellow of five-and-thirty, and despite his Scotch extraction, one of the most popular men in the district. Mrs Bingley of the castle possessed large salmon fisheries; Murray was her overseer, and Charlie her hopeful son and heir.

Breakfast over, we strolled out to the ‘Yawl,’ which we found waiting for us, manned by four sturdy rowers—Shawn, two of his big brothers, and Conolly Magrath. Rugs were spread in the stern, and others in the bow, to sit or lie on, and there were cheerful glimpses of bottles and capacious luncheon baskets.

My uncle carried his rifle; I had my new Holland choke bore, and Bingley was content with a muzzle-loader, an old Joe Manton.

Three of the girls, Kathleen, Aileen, and Oona were of the party, and all were in the best of spirits. I had almost forgotten to mention Nero, Amy’s retriever, which she lent to us for the day.

We set out early in the forenoon—and such a fore-

noon! The sky was bright as gold; the heathery mountains rose purple clear on either side, with every mossy boulder, each snowy torrent, imaged clearly in the crystal water. 'Not a feature of the hills was in the mirror slighted.' To our right, as we rowed up the broad fjord, rose the hills of Erris—green slopes undulating to peaks of rock and crests of heather; to our left stretched the lower range of the islands of Moira, on which the sea clouds rest in stormy weather, but which were now dark and rugged in the blinding sunlight. Before us, on the fjord itself, rose bright green isles and emerald promontories, with nothing living, save an occasional flight of wild duck, to disturb the tranquil scene.

My uncle sat in the stern, helm in hand. On his right sat Aileen and Murray; on his left Kathleen, Oona, and myself. Young Bingley had taken his position in the bow, keenly expectant of a shot at something flying.

Presently we left the village far behind, and came among the innumerable small islands which dot the fjord. On every promontory sat a heron, patiently watching the water, and rising leisurely out of gunshot as we approached.

'Look out, Charlie,' cried Murray suddenly. 'There's a duck!'

And, indeed, one of the canard species was approaching at lightning speed, high up in the air. Without turning in his flight he passed right over us.

Bang! bang! went Charlie's gun. Bang! bang! went off mine.

'Sure, she's far out of range,' said my uncle quietly; which was certainly the case.

'We'll land on Mackinroy,' continued my uncle. 'A pack of grouse breeds there every year, and the dog will be sure to put them up.'

The island to which he alluded was right before us—a low-lying, damp piece of land, with some clumps of rugged heather. We ran the boat into a creek. Young Bingley jumped out, and I followed with the dog.

‘Won’t you come, Achill?’ said Charles to his friend.

‘No ; I’ll stay here with the girls,’ answered Murray laughing.

We climbed the shore, and came out upon as wet and ugly a flat as could be found even in Ireland. We soon discovered that Murray was wise in not accompanying us, for the very first step we took inland, we found ourselves wading knee deep, and Nero, who raced on a little in advance of us, splashed up the water as he ran. It certainly did not seem a likely place for grouse, but there were one or two dry knolls of heather where a bird or two might be discovered.

Suddenly, just as I floundered into a boghole, a big hare got up at my very feet ; I was too flurried to fire, and Bingley rolled him over.

‘Well fired, your honor!’ cried a voice behind us, and Conolly, running up, appropriated pussy.

‘Wheet, wheet!’ up got a snipe, and went away zigzag before us ; we both fired, and missed.

‘Never mind,’ cried Conolly, ‘you’ve given him a fright, anyway!’

Presently, the dog, who had been scampering somewhat aimlessly, began to ‘draw’ in a straight line forward. We followed him as fast as the wet ground would permit us, and soon saw, running swiftly before us, a number of brown birds with their wings trailing and their heads low down. But the retriever rushed in wildly, and up got, out of range, six grouse, headed by the old cock.

They did not fly far, however, and we marked them as they alighted among deep heather five hundred yards away. Conolly held up the dog, and we walked to the spot. The birds lay like stones. We walked all over the place, and were just going to loosen the dog, when the old cock rose, and fell immediately to my gun. Then three of the pack got up together, and we secured a brace ; and finally, with the aid of Nero, we accounted for two more.

We walked leisurely on, and for some time discovered nothing more, save several snipe, which got up out of range. Suddenly, Conolly, who was walking some distance to our right, crouched down, and began running towards us at full speed.

‘What is it?’ I cried, as he came up panting.

He explained rapidly that, peeping over at the adjoining shore, he had caught a glimpse of a number of ducks swimming close to the water’s edge. By walking over at a point indicated by his finger, we were certain to get a shot.

Away we went, stumbling and splashing. We reached a dark knoll overlooking the shore, and surmounted it, ready to fire, but we saw nothing; and while we were gazing down vacantly—whirr! whirr! quack! quack! up got a dozen mallard from right under us. We fired all four barrels, and dropped two birds on the very edge of the sea; while another, after flying some distance, fell like a stone into the water, and floated dead.

‘After him, honey!’ cried Conolly; and away went Nero, beating the crystal tide. He soon returned with the bird in his mouth.

Flushed and victorious, we now went back to the yawl. After all, we had the laugh at Murray, who had missed some capital sport, but he was very busy with Aileen, and didn’t seem to care.

To reward our prowess, my uncle served out glasses all round, and then we rowed away again upon the water. There is nothing like whisky to warm a boatman’s heart, and soon the rowers were chattering together in Irish. My uncle pricked up his ears, for he spoke the lingo like a native.

‘What’s that about, Mr O’Neil?’ he asked sharply, addressing Conolly.

Conolly smiled his childlike Chineesh smile.

‘Nothing, your honor,’ he replied; ‘only the poor creature has got protection. He’s got six peelers to guard him,—two in the kitchen, two in the parlour, and

two at the gate, and sorra drop or nip can he take without them to watch over him !’

‘Nonsense ; there’s only one policeman up at the castle !’

‘Only one, is it ?’ exclaimed Conolly in mock surprise. ‘Sure that is a small attendance for so mighty a man !’

At this sally the other boatsmen were convulsed—Shawn almost ‘catching a crab’ in the height of his merriment.

‘Ah, you’re a bad lot,’ cried my uncle ; ‘O’Neil’s too good for Connaught !,’

‘Too good, your honor !’ replied Conolly ; ‘well, then, if that’s so, sorra one will mind when he goes to a better place !’

‘You want *me* for a landlord,’ said my uncle, shaking his fist.

‘Troth, then, we do ; more power to ye ! It’s not the likes of *you* that could be turning poor boys out of house and home !’

‘I’d have my rents out of you, and if you didn’t pay, I’d evict the whole of you ! What do you think of that, now ?’

It was very easy to see what they thought of it, for my uncle’s good nature and generosity were notorious. They heeded his high words no more than the idle wind. Hadn’t he stood up for the boys again and again, when it was a question between rich and poor !

‘O’Neil’s a poor-spirited man,’ said my uncle in an aside to me : ‘he doesn’t understand the people, and I’m afraid he’ll get into trouble.’

We were now in the narrows, and far away to our right we could see the highway. All at once, Conolly uttered an exclamation.

‘Look, it’s himself !’

In the far distance, trotting slowly along the road, was a dog-cart. A grey-haired gentleman in an ulster was driving, with a groom seated at his side, and two armed policeman behind him. They went very leisurely, and whenever they approached any turn in the road, or other

‘coign of vantage,’ the groom peeped nervously forward, holding something in his hand.

Conolly rested on his oar, convulsed with silent laughter.

‘See to Sam the Sassenach, now,’ he said. ‘He’s got the master’s big pistol : but he’s in dread of his life.’

‘Sam the Sassenach,’ so called by the tenantry, was Mr O’Neil’s English groom, a fat and timorous importation from Belgravia, who looked upon the Irish as barbarians, and without an ‘h’ to bless himself with, held them and their language in the utmost contempt.

‘Oh, mille murther,’ cried Conolly, ‘if your honor would only lend me the gun, I would like to have a shot at the *bouchal*—bad cess to him !’

‘Silence, you scoundrel !’ thundered my uncle ; ‘how dare you talk like that ?’

‘Sure, it’s too far off for him to be hurted !’ pleaded Conolly. ‘But if he only heard the ghost of the sound, he’d be off, like my mother’s lame gander, screeching wid the fright.’

The road pursued by the dog-cart wound through the lonely waste ; and in the loneliest part of all, on the way-side, stood an iron police hut, where there was a detachment of police day and night. Close to the hut the dog-cart stopped, and several black figures ran over and stood talking with Mr O’Neil.

It was curious to watch the change of expression in the boatmen’s faces as they looked at the distant group. Their brows were knit, their teeth set, their whole look was indescribably sinister and forbidding.

‘Away with ye !’ cried my uncle, and with one last scowl of hatred and disdain, they bent themselves to their oars.

It was now scorching hot, and the windless waters of the fjord flashed back the splendours of the sun, like a golden mirror, on which our boat was crawling, like a fly. The hills on every side of us, the reflections of the hills under us, were netted in a throbbing haze of light.

It was hard work rowing in such a blaze ; and soon the

men leant on their oars, panting and perspiring. My uncle looked at his watch ; it was two o'clock.

'Where shall we lunch, girls ?' he said.

The girls did not know. There were a thousand bright places round about, and one is as good as another.

'Try Eilian na Sealgh, your honor,' suggested Conolly. 'There it lies before ye, wid a strip of white sand and a stream of fresh water, and besides that, there's a chance at the seals on the rocks.'

We had only to glance at the island, lying green and sunny, right before us, with the 'strip of white sand' shining like gold ; and Conolly's suggestion was carried *nem con.*

There was a mile to row ; but with the prospect of rest and whisky before them, the men pulled like galley slaves escaping for life. Before long we ran in on the golden sand, Conolly and Shawn jumped in knee-deep, and carried us out one by one, with guns, luncheon, baskets, rugs, and other paraphernalia.

Oh that golden beach of Eilian na Sealgh !

Oh the tiny rivulet running silvern down the mossy rocks, and trickling down in innumerable diamonds and rubies to the cool white fringe of the sea !

Oh the lichened rocks, scattered here and there, making dark shades for coolness, the silvery sand as dry as gold dust, which when you lifted it in your hand you found to be full of countless tiny shells, glittering with all the colours of the prism !

Did my reader, who has doubtless picnicked many a time on some green bank or scented lawn on the banks of the Thames, or on some heathery knoll in the Highlands, ever find such an oasis as I am trying to describe ? If so, his lines have indeed been cast, as mine were, in pleasant places ! When Aileen, with Murray's assistance, had spread the snowy cloth on the sands ; when Oona had laid out the silver luncheon service, knives, forks, and glasses ; and when Kathleen had produced the contents of her baskets,—cold patées, grouse pies, fowl and ham, enough to provision a garrison for a week, with

sherry and whisky for the men, and a bottle of champagne for the girls,—who would have thought that we were banqueting in hapless Ireland, with Land Leaguers and landlord shooters for attendant spirits?

While Conolly and the boatmen withdrew to a little distance and threw themselves down in the shelter of the rocks, waiting for their turn to come, we feasted royally, and discovered before long that the girls, who understood Irish appetites, had not made such unnecessary provision after all.

Then, fished out of the basket by Kathleen's deft hand, and received with a shout of acclamation, came some of my uncle's choicest cigars, which were merrily handed round.

'And now,' said my uncle, 'let the boys have their turn; while they're feeding we'll have a turn round the island, and maybe a shot at a seal!'

So we rose and scattered, while Kathleen and Oona signalled to the men.

'Don't leave them too much whisky, darlings,' said my uncle as he started off, 'or we'll never get home to-night!'

The girls laughed and nodded, while we lifted up our guns and prepared to inspect the island.

Somehow or other—was it by accident or of set purpose, I wonder?—we separated on our tour of inspection. My uncle strolled off with Bingley and Kathleen, Murray disappeared with Aileen, and I, ten minutes after lunch was over, found myself wandering among the sweet-smelling heather with Oona by my side!

That must bring the record of my day's adventure to a conclusion. What took place afterwards is *not* to be put on paper! As for sporting after that ramble with Oona, it was out of the question. The rest of the day's sailing seemed like a dream. I was dimly conscious of the sun setting and the moon beginning to rise: of the silvern radiance lighting bay and creek, and leaving the hills in ink-black shadow: of the phosphorescent water splashing from the boatmen's oars, while Conolly, well warmed with whisky, crooned ballads about the 'Green Shamrock,'

and 'Rory of the Hills.' All I cared for was the touch of a little hand and the smile of a gentle face. At last, as the boat grated on the shingle, and we prepared to alight close to home, my uncle clapped me on the shoulder.

'Jack, my boy, wake up,' he said merrily; 'you've been wool-gathering all the day!'

CHAPTER VI.

WE were all very tired after that day's outing, and made a singularly quiet party in the drawing-room after dinner. My uncle indeed had fallen back in his chair in a sound sleep. I was feeling very much as if I should soon follow his example, when a voice in my ear aroused me.

'Cousin Jack,' it said, 'I believe I saw you nodding! Sure, now, if you sleep all the evening you'll spoil your night's rest, so come and see my study!'

I opened my eyes. I rose with alacrity, for I had recognised the voice as Oona's, and when that voice spoke, trust me to follow! Besides, the study of which I had heard so much, and seen absolutely nothing, contained certain treasures at which I longed to have a peep. Once or twice already I had expressed my desire to make my way up to the hallowed spot, but my entreaties had always been without avail. There was some work going on there which I must not disturb, some precious papers lying about which I must not examine. When Oona was out, the door of the virgin sanctuary was securely locked, and the key placed in her pocket; when she was in, she was mostly locked in all alone.

But times were changed; the precious work was finished or destroyed, and the room was open.

'Patience has at length reaped its reward,' I said to myself as I followed Oona upstairs, and found myself at last standing in the middle of the chamber.

It was just such a room as I should have imagined my

dreamy cousin to have ; it was daintily fitted up, and contained such a profusion of first-class writing materials as showed me at once that she was by no means an established litterateur. Go into the study of a literary blue-stocking, pure and simple, and you will find scarcely one pen fit to write with, scarcely a bit of decent paper on which to scribble your name ; but Oona had everything of the best, a perfect profusion of pens, ink, and papers, two large waste-paper baskets crammed full to overflowing, a nice collection of books, and two pretty reading-lamps for burning the midnight oil.

I examined the room, and praised it. I endeavoured to be duly impressed by the silver medals and the handsome volume of fables which Oona had received as a child.

Then I asked for the manuscripts, which, I must confess, aroused my curiosity. But they were not forthcoming. Instead, I was told to sit down and be patient, as Oona wanted to *talk* to me.

Nothing loth, I threw myself into an easy-chair, and waited.

‘Cousin Jack,’ she began, taking a chair in front of me, and looking seriously into my face, ‘I have written a story.’

‘So I should have guessed,’ I returned, glancing at the profusion of writing materials which filled the room.

‘No ; but I mean a long story, a good story, a story that really ought to be *published*.’

‘My dear,’ I returned, laughing, ‘most authors think the same ; if they didn’t, there wouldn’t be quite so much trash given to the world.’

But Oona was in no joking mood. To my utter amazement, I saw her pale cheek flush, her lovely eyes fill with tears. She rose, and would have left the room, but I stopped her.

‘Oona !’ I cried in amazement, ‘what’s the matter ?’

‘Nothing,’ was the curt reply.

‘But there is,’ I persisted ; ‘you are offended at my silly joke, and you want to quarrel with me, but I’m not

going to allow it. I'll apologise. I'll do anything you like to show I'm sorry; but if you persist in hardening your heart against me, I'll not stop another hour in Storport.'

As I spoke the last words, I saw ever so slight a shadow pass over her face; her lip quivered, and the large tears that had gathered in her eyes began to fall; the next moment she was actually sobbing on my shoulder.

I tried to soothe her, but I must confess I was by no means displeased at these curious changes in her temperament. I folded my arms about her and caressed her forehead like—like a father; and as she lay sobbing in my arms, with her lovely face hidden on my shoulder, I discovered what, but for this little incident, might have remained a secret for some time longer. During these few weeks of lazy enjoyment, while I had been studying the Connaught peasants and lounging about the Connaught bogs, I had fallen very deeply in love with the prettiest girl in the district.

I stood like one in a dream, spell-bound with delight. How long I remained thus I don't know—time stood still for me, and my head whirled round. But suddenly I became conscious that her sobs had ceased, that she withdrew herself from my embrace, raised for a moment her blushing face to mine, and then turned to leave the room.

But again I stopped her.

'Come,' I said, 'tell me we are friends.'

She did not answer, but she hung her head, as if to hide her tear-stained face, and held forth her hand. I took it in both of mine, and drew her towards me. At first she resisted, then she allowed me to press her to my breast and kiss her. No words were spoken, but I felt she understood, and I knew that she loved me.

She begged for a few minutes' leave of absence to bathe her tear-stained cheeks, and I let her go; when she returned I thought her looking more charming than she had ever been before. There was a magical light in her eyes, a fine flush on her cheek, and a winning smile

upon her pretty lips, which I tried to persuade myself had not been there before. She laughed, too, with a sort of hysterical gladness; there was a tremor in her voice, and I could not get her to look straight at me, but when I drew my chair close to the one in which she sat, and took her hand in mine, she did not draw it away.

I had forgotten all about the story, but Oona had not; to my amazement she took up the subject, which had almost caused us to quarrel, in nervous haste.

'Cousin Jack,' she said, 'don't you really want to hear about my story?'

'Of course I do,' I returned. 'I have been waiting all this time to hear about it. But, Oona, why not call me "Jack," without the "cousin"?''

'You would like it better?'

'Much better.'

'Very well, then; if you will listen patiently I will try.'

I was perfectly willing to listen so long as I could keep my seat by her side, and hold her warm little hand in mine. So as we sat thus, Oona told me about the story—that wonderful story upon which all her hopes of future greatness were evidently based. The narrative, she said, was true—that is to say, it was an exact record of events which had actually taken place at Kildare Castle some half a century ago. Kildare, she proceeded to explain, was a most romantic spot, situated about twelve Irish miles from Storport. Oona, attended by either Conolly or Shawn, had ridden thither again and again, was well acquainted with the old cauliagh who lived in the keep and had charge of the ruin; consequently she had been shown over it, not once but many times, had inspected every relic extant, and had heard the history of a wildly improbable and most unfortunate love affair which had happened to the Ross family that very generation.

'It is this story,' continued Oona, 'which I have written in my own way, and which I want you to read. But sit still; I'll get you the manuscript presently. I have something more to tell you first.'

‘Go on, my darling; I am all attention.’

‘Well, before you came—that is to say, when you wrote to say that you would come—we girls got much more interested in you than we had been before, and we talked a great deal about you. After a good many discussions we settled in our minds what you must be like, and then as we had promised papa to do our best to amuse you, we began to consider how we could best keep our promise. But now we all disagreed: one thought you would like one thing, and one another, and we began to despair of coming to any conclusion, when Kathleen suggested a plan which we all agreed to. She said that, as we had so many ideas of amusing you, you ought to get the benefit of them all; that we ought each to take a day, to be called by the name of the one who chose it, and during that day the girl whose name it bore would undertake all the arrangements; that, at the end of the visit, you were to be made to say which day you had enjoyed the most—Kathleen’s day, Aileen’s day, Nora’s day, my day, Biddy’s day, or Amy’s day. Well, what do you think of it?’

‘What do I think of it? Why, I think it’s far and away the best thing I’ve heard since I came to Storport. But I can’t make out why I was never told of it before.’

‘Why,’ said Oona, looking at me from head to foot, and giving her half shy smile, ‘you would have heard of it soon enough if you had been stout and middle-aged like papa. We were all agreed upon one point—that you would be too short in the breath to bear the fatigue of much walking on the bogs. We thought you would want to be driven about sight-seeing, and entertained in that way; but when we found how different you were, we thought you wouldn’t want us to amuse you. But the other day, when I had just finished my story, I thought I would tell you of it, because I wanted to take my day.’

‘Good fairy number one!’ I said. ‘Well, Oona, when would you like the day to be? and what would you like to do? I should dearly love to hear my little girl’s idea

of the best way of entertaining me even for twenty-four hours !’

‘ But if you don’t like the idea ? ’

‘ Then I’ll say so ! ’

‘ Will you really ? Then you shall hear. I am afraid it is rather selfish,’ continued Oona, ‘ but after all you may enjoy it. . . . Well, I should like the day to be to-morrow. I should like to make up a party, all the girls. papa, and you, and go for a day’s excursion over to Kildare. Some of us would ride and some would drive. We could see the old castle and the village, take our luncheon with us, and get back in time for dinner in the evening, then after dinner I should like you to read my story. I think you would find it much more interesting after you had seen the place where the scene is laid.’

The plan delighted me, and I said so to Oona’s infinite satisfaction ; one thing only I stipulated for,—that I was to be allowed to read the story alone, after I had retired for the night.

Having thus arranged matters to our mutual satisfaction, we descended to the drawing-room, where tea was awaiting us. Upon Oona making her plans known, everybody seconded them, and without any demur it was agreed that the next day was to be christened

OONA’S DAY.

The next morning I rose early, half-an-hour before my usual time, but upon descending the stairs I found that preparations for the day’s amusement were already in hand. Both Conolly and Shawn, bereft of both coat and waistcoat, were working with a will for once in their lives. Conolly was in the stable preparing the horses ; Shawn was rubbing up the phaeton, and packing into it the luncheon baskets, well filled by Kate. There was also a large basket under Oona’s special charge ; it was filled with numerous packages of tea, sugar, tobacco, and ttle flasks of whisky, to be distributed amongst Kate’s nsioners in the little village of Kildarè. Kate had

intended to be one of the party, but fate was against her. Amy, who for some days had been suffering with a decaying tooth, rose that morning with a swelled face, and was crying with the intense pain, so Kate sent off Shawn's brother Mickie for Dr Maguire, and gave up her day's outing to attend to her sister at home.

By eight o'clock we were all assembled round the breakfast-table ready dressed for the day. The four girls wore riding-habits. Oona, who had donned hers for the first time since I came to Storport, looked prettier than I had ever seen her, and was responsible for the exceedingly meagre breakfast I took. Whether or not she was conscious of this I cannot say,—she scarcely looked my way at all, and took no notice whatever of me, and she succeeded in diverting general attention from me, at the expense of Aileen, whom she joked incessantly about Murray's particular attentions the day before. In the middle of the breakfast she left the table and went over to Amy, who sat by the fire looking the picture of misery, with her head wrapped up in flannel.

Breakfast over, we all made a move.

'Now, girls,' cried my uncle, 'how are you going to place yourselves, for, sure enough, 'tis time we were started? Alley, will you ride? Jack, my boy, will you make a trial of Lucy? She's fresh after being stabled for a couple of days, and will do herself credit.'

'Oh, papa, don't give Jack Lucy this morning!' cried Oona; then remembering herself, she came to a sudden and confused stop.

Lucy was my uncle's riding mare, a handsome thoroughbred, famous for bolting, and shying when ridden by a stranger, but as docile as a lamb beneath her master's hand. When she first came into the family, my uncle had intended her for a birthday present for one of the girls; in the nick of time, however, her infirmities were discovered. My uncle, finding her quiet beneath his hand, decided to keep her for his own use, and forbade the girls to ride her. No sooner had the edict gone forth than Aileen, who was a wild, fearless horsewoman,

was seized with a desire to have a canter on Lucy's back.

One day, when she and Nora were riding, they came upon Conolly, who was exercising the mare. The girls rode up to him, and Aileen, after a deal of persuasion, succeeded in inducing him to change the saddles, placing her own on Lucy's back, and his upon the horse on which she sat.

This done, Aileen, her eyes sparkling with delight, placed her foot in Conolly's hand, and leapt lightly into the saddle. Alas ! no sooner was she fairly seated, and with the reins in her hand, than Lucy reared, plunged, turned round and round, and finally bolted across country at lightning speed. On she went, her neck swelling, her eyes glaring, and foam flying from her mouth,—over ditches and stone walls, and across dangerous stretches of bog,—while Aileen, almost paralysed with fright, sat helpless in the saddle.

Being a good horsewoman, she managed to keep her seat until the mare galloped up the broad drive to Ballyshanrany, and paused before her stable door. Then Aileen fainted away.

From that day forth the girls regarded Lucy with positive terror; it was the remembrance of this which had made Oona's cheeks turn pale when her father proposed I should ride the mare.

Lucy was certainly very fresh that morning; she pawed the gravel, champed her bit, tossed her head, and looked ready for a race indeed. Not being an over-brilliant rider, I firmly refused my uncle's invitation to mount the mare, and he took her himself. Aileen and Nora sprang into their saddles, and the phaeton, drawn by a couple of sturdy ponies, was left for Biddy, Oona, and myself.

All the horses were tolerably fresh, and we started off at a spanking pace, the riders galloping on ahead, and Oona guiding her ponies with a wonderfully steady hand. For some distance the road which we traversed was the one which I had travelled on first coming to Storport, a

dreary road enough, with flat stretches of bogland on either side of us, backed in the far distance by ranges of desolate-looking hills.

The weather had changed too, for the sun had disappeared behind banks of threatening clouds, and the usual mist was driving about like smoke.

We had left the village far behind, and were passing through a country as desolate looking as the prairies. Here and there we picked out a woman working diligently on the bog, sometimes we passed a donkey trudging sleepily along with its turf-laden panniers, and driven by a barefooted little urchin ; but that was all. Presently the riders slackened their speed. Shawn, who was seated in the rumble behind the carriage, spoke rapidly to Oona in the Irish tongue. She immediately pulled the ponies up.

‘We are near the river,’ she said, addressing me, ‘and Shawn thinks you may find a few ducks lying under the bank. You needn’t go unless you like ; you’ll have to pass over some nasty ground before you get a shot.

We had come to a standstill. Shawn had leapt from his seat, and was passing with immense strides over the bogland which lay on our right. The riders had fallen back, and my uncle, who was now close to the phaeton, called out,—

‘Jack, my boy, out with your gun and away with you, for you are pretty sure of a duck. Stop a bit, I’ll go along with you. Timlin, ye thief, come and hold Lucy, and see you hold her well.’

So saying, he slipped from the saddle, threw the bridle to a ragged urchin who had been at work cutting turf on the bog, and who came up immediately to my uncle’s call, possessed himself of his gun, which had been packed away in the phaeton, and put some cartridges in his pocket. I hastened to follow his example, and we started off, shaping our course according to the signs we received from Shawn.

The ground on which our course lay was a black stretch of bogland, miry and spongy to the tread, interspread with tussocks of hard earth and stunted heather,

so that our walk consisted of a series of jumps from one to another of these points of vantage. For a time we went along in this fashion, I keeping in the wake of my uncle, who, being well accustomed to that sort of thing, was bounding along like a boy. Presently, finding the muscles of my legs getting painful, and my breath about to leave me, I gazed around, and perceived what I believed a haven of rest, a broad piece of land, green, fresh, and fair, lying exactly between Shawn and me.

I looked round, intending to point this out to my uncle, but he was already far on ahead, and keeping still to the tussocks which skirted this fresh, green plain. I dared not call aloud to him, for fear of disturbing the ducks, so I determined to let him go on and take advantage myself of the green sward.

I stepped upon it, heedless of the wild antics indulged in by Shawn, and found it decidedly moist, but after all, I mentally declared, an improvement on the tussocks. I had got about half-way over when my progress was arrested by loud cries, and looking round I perceived that both my uncle and Shawn were making the most violent gestures intended for my edification. Imagining that they were urging me on to greater speed, I quickened my footsteps, when all of a sudden I found that the earth had literally opened and swallowed me.

Yes, there I was, buried up to the arm-pits, and only saved from entire suffocation by the gun, which, by a lucky accident, rested on a couple of tussocks, and afforded me some support.

I was in despair and utterly helpless ; my legs and body were fast becoming frozen with the cold contact of mire, and I felt it was sucking me down.

‘Lie quite, yer honor, lie quiet,’ called Shawn, heedless now of ducks or geese either ; ‘don’t move, but keep a firm hold of the gun.’

I did as he suggested, and despite the deathly suction all around me, I managed to keep myself up, while Shawn and my uncle, keeping to the tussocks still, came up to within half-a-dozen yards of me. Then Shawn,

who had taken from his waist certain coils of rope, which served him as braces, made a large noose, and threw it towards me. I managed with considerable difficulty to slip my arms through it. When this was done, my uncle and Shawn laid hold of the other end, and they drew me out 'pop' like a cork from a bottle. When the operation was over, and I stood upon a tussock safe and sound, my condition may be better imagined than described. I felt as if the lower part of my body was made of mud and ice, but both my uncle and Shawn were perspiring furiously.

'Keep to the tussocks in future, Jack!' said my uncle; 'tis the only foothold you can trust; besides, your next adventure of the kind may not end so well. I once had a valuable mare in the same plight, and as we couldn't get the poor beast out, we had to shoot her.'

He then produced the flask, which he always carried in the breast-pocket of his shooting-jacket, and gave us whisky all round. Knowing by this time that the ducks must have been frightened into the next county, we started for the road. As both the barrels of my gun were clogged with filth, I handed it to Shawn, but my uncle managed to pick up a couple of solitary snipe which rose at his very feet.

When we reached the road we found the girls, who had watched the adventure, in a state of great excitement. They had all changed places too. Aileen and Nora were seated in the phaeton. Oona and Biddy had managed somehow to get into the saddles, and they one and all insisted that I must mount Lucy. Oona's fear of the mare seemed to me to have disappeared, but I afterwards discovered that she had mounted Jack with some wild idea of being at hand to preserve me from danger if Lucy should prove refractory.

So we started off again, and after a preliminary canter, during which I found Lucy the very queen of horse-flesh, I felt none the worse of my adventure. A warm glow was stealing all over me. I bent forward in my saddle,

and the three horses, keeping well abreast, galloped merrily along the road.

In this manner we entered the village of Kildare.

The village proper consisted of a mere handful of huts, which looked as if they had been thrown up at random on the bog, just as moles throw up their tiny mounds of earth. They seemed to me to resemble the cabins inhabited by the Esquimaux, lying low, built of mud, and thatched with turf sods. Here and there at the doors an old woman was squatting on her haunches, smoking a black pipe, or two or three naked urchins were rolling in the sunlight.

I took one glance at the village, then I turned to Oona, who was pointing with her hand,—

‘Look, Jack, look!’ she said, ‘that is Kildare Castle.’

The ruins of the old castle stood on a low, green promontory, or rather an isthmus, connected by a narrow neck of sand with the adjoining land. Part of it was roofless and uninhabited, save by a noisy flock of jack-daws; but attached to the ruin was a low, modern-looking building, dilapidated enough, but still tolerably habitable. On the green sward in front large numbers of tame geese were feeding. Beyond stretched the estuary of the sea, broken into crisp light waves, and shifting its colours like a sword blade in the sun.

I had just finished my survey when the phaeton drove up, and there began a general discussion as to what we must all do. Of course it went without saying that Oona and I must inspect the castle, and Biddy volunteered to join us. My uncle preferred a couple of hours on the moor, while Aileen and Nora volunteered to distribute Kathleen’s gifts, and afterwards to lay out the lunch, so as to have everything ready for a pleasant meal by the time we were all re-assembled. My uncle therefore took his gun and walked off, promising to be back at the hour fixed for lunch, while the rest of us pushed on across the isthmus to stable the horses somewhere among the ruined castle walls.

Our progress was somewhat slow, for the road was as

neglected as the castle itself. It was full of deep ruts, covered with stones, and overgrown with rank weeds and grass ; but we crossed the isthmus in safety, and leaving the modern building on one side, passed under a ruined archway, covered with rank moss and trailing ivy leaves. We found ourselves in an old grass-paven courtyard, at the further end of which was an open door leading to the castle tower.

Leaving our horses to graze in the courtyard, we climbed the winding stairs of the tower, and soon found ourselves high up among the ruins. Below us lay the interior of the old building—roofless, grass-paven, and strewn with stones, surrounded on every side by ruined walls, broken arches, and fragments of masonry. The jackdaws rose screaming over our heads, and hovered against the blue sky. Right below us lay the sea, breaking against the black rocks of the promontory.

From point to point we crept up mouldering stairs, which suddenly ceased in mid-air, into dark holes and corners, that had once been rooms, down right under the ruins, where there was actually a real ‘dungeon.’ We had no guide, and thanked Heaven for that escape ; but Oona acted informally as *cicerone*, without boring us with irrational history and impossible legends, till our tour of merry inspection came to an end.

We had lingered so long a time in the ruin, looking over the relics of the past, and discussing Oona’s story, that when we came down we found the girls and my uncle actually awaiting lunch. A goodly-sized wooden table had been carried from the neighbouring building into the courtyard, and upon this the lunch was spread—all sorts of cakes and dainties, baked by Kathleen’s deft hand, with some wine and whisky to wash them down. By this time our arrival had become known, and the population of the village seemed to be turning out to welcome us.

Dozens of ragged gorsoons, looking like little savages, with unkempt heads and bare feet, clustered round the open gateway, or glared through every loophole within

reach, while the cauliaghs, young colleens, and men of the village came up to welcome 'his honor' and the 'young ladies—God bless them!'

With their assistance Alley and Nora managed to empty the baskets which had been sent by Kate.

We had a capital lunch—feeling very romantic all the while, with the ruined walls about us, and the open sky above us.

We were waited on by Shawn and the withered-looking old cauliagh who kept the castle. When it was over we lit up our cigars and strolled out upon the promontory, leaving a goodly proportion of food and wine to be distributed at Shawn's discretion.

It was getting on in the afternoon, and as the day waned, the weather grew brighter. The sun was shining now from a cloudless sky, and when I looked back I thought the village of Kildare as picturesque a portion of wild Connaught as I had seen, and the old castle, in whose shadow I was standing, looked the most charming of all. For the sun sparkled amidst its ivy leaves, and revived the crumbling walls, while below it the sea washed with ceaseless music.

'Look!' said Oona, laying her hand upon my arm, and pointing.

Some yards distant, and right under the ruins, there lay an old well, reached by a few broken steps. It seemed desolate and disused, but looking down, I saw the water black and cool.

'Do you know,' whispered Oona, 'the people here say that, at some seasons of the year, the water down there is red! Two brothers fought there, and the murdered body of one was found floating in the well!'

'Have you got that in the story?'

'Oh, don't laugh!' said Oona. 'These terrible things are true!'

We took a short stroll along the water's edge, talking of this and other superstitions. When we got back to the castle, we found that everything was in readiness for our departure,—the horses were saddled, the ponies

harnessed, the phaeton neatly packed again. The crowd around the castle walls had increased ; its members were evidently waiting to give us a wild cheer as we started. Again the discussion began as to how we must dispose ourselves, when Oona spoke.

‘We will start just as we did this morning,’ she said, ‘and when we’re halfway we’ll change. You three will take the phaeton, and we’ll have the horses for the last canter home—eh, Jack?’

But I shook my head.

‘Won’t do at all,’ I said. ‘*We* will take the horses in starting, and when we’ve cantered halfway, you must be content to sit quietly in the phaeton, Oona, and I’ll drive the ponies home!’

I had reflected that during the latter half of our return journey the earth would be plunged in that dim uncertain light which makes the most prosaic soul romantic—that during this time I should love to be seated in the phaeton with Oona nestling on the rugs by my side, and probably her little hand lying warm and tremulous on mine.

My wishes carried the day, and during the latter half of that return journey I felt like a man entranced. When I pulled up the ponies at the door of the lodge, and saw Kate standing on the threshold with a candle in her hand, I startled as one awakening from a dream. I extricated Oona from her rugs, and lifted her out, and as I did so I saw that her eyes were sparkling with a dreamy kind of joy, and her cheeks were suffused with love’s own red.

I followed Kate into the Lodge, and, in answer to her inquiry, assured her it had been the happiest day I had ever spent in my life.

I went to bed very early that night, but when once I was comfortably settled on my pillows I took out Oona’s manuscript, and proceeded to read her story.

Here it is:—

I.

How the wind blew ! How the rain poured ! The substantial walls of Kildare Castle seemed to be shaken to their foundations, and above the dreary moaning of the wind came the ceaseless patter of the rain.

‘The Lord preserve us ! what a night,’ said Bridget O’Rook, as she threw a liberal supply of turf on the blazing kitchen fire ; ‘and as if it wasn’t bad enough to listen to the wind and the rain, there’s the whole of ye sitting like *taisches*. It’s a poor place is Kildare Castle when Master Conn is away ! Andy Beg, ye lazy loon ye ! if ye’ve any life in ye, play us a tune ; and if ye cannot dance *patter-a-pie*, or sing a song, or tell a tale, Owen More, ye might as well have stayed in yer own house to-night !’

‘I’ll play ye a tune, an’ welcome, Bridget, *machree*,’ said the ragged-looking ruffian addressed, as he polished his tin-whistle on his ragged coat-sleeve ; ‘only I was thinking that maybe the master wouldn’t be so well plased to hear us to-night.’

‘And why not, pray ?’ sharply returned Bridget. ‘Isn’t it the young master who left us two years ago to go to America that we’re expecting home ; and hasn’t Master Conn gone to fetch home one that we shall all be proud of ? This night should be a night of rejoicing, Owen More !’

‘And that’s true enough, Mistress Bridget. But, in troth, I’m hoping the young master won’t come to-night. God help them that this wailing wind blows home !’

With eyes staring wide in astonishment, and a frown of resentment on her brow, Bridget was about to reply, when the kitchen-door suddenly opened, and another figure crept in. The rain beat in behind the new-comer, and the fierce gusts of wind scattered the white ashes on the hearth ; but the door was quickly banged to, and the new-comer unslung a canvas bag which was buckled

around his rain-drenched shoulders, and threw it on to the kitchen table.

‘No letters to-night, Mistress Bridget, but good news!’ he said. ‘The cutter, wid the young mashter on board, is in the shelter of Mackinray, and by this time the young mashter has landed!’

‘Is that true, Shamus O’Neil?’

‘Sure enough, I was crossing the sands wid the letters, and when I saw the light, and knew well enough what it was, I just gave the word to the boys that were on the shore, and they took the ferry-boat out, and then they gave one shout to tell me that the young mashter was landing!’

Not a word answered Bridget; but she left the kitchen, tripped nimbly along the hall, and gently opened the library door.

‘Mr Antony is come, yer honor,’ she said, to an old gentleman who sat reading by the fire. Her words were literally true. No sooner had she uttered them than a wild banging and shouting was heard without, and, on the hall-door being thrown open, a dark figure strode in.

‘The heavy gust of wind which blew him across the threshold was so confusing that none could see his face; but Bridget, recognising the deformed figure wrapped in the heavy ulster, and wearing a dripping wide-awake hat, said, as she hastily stepped back out of the region of the wind and rain,—

‘Yer welcome, Mr Antony!’

‘It’s a wild night I’ve brought with me, Bridget,’ returned Antony Ross. ‘Pile up the kitchen fire, give the skipper some supper, and the boys a glass all round, for we’re drenched to the skin.’ Then passing into the library, and taking his father’s hand, he asked quickly,—

‘Is Alma here?’

‘Miss Clifford?’ returned the old man, who still held the hand of his drenched and storm-tossed son. ‘No, she’s not here, Antony. What madcap freak made you weather the storm to-night?’

The young man laughed.

‘I’m not sugar to be blown away by a puff of wind, or melted with a little rain. The skipper wanted to turn tail when the storm began, but I determined to push on. I thought Alma would be here, and I wanted to be able to welcome her home.’

The old man smiled.

‘If you are not sugar, Antony, my boy, you’re soft enough about Miss Clifford. But put your mind at rest about her to-night; she’s safe with Conn!’

In a moment, as the old man mentioned that name, he saw the features of his son contract—as with acute pain, the sun-tanned cheek turned white as death, the powerful hands grew cold and tremulous.

‘Conn!’ he echoed faintly; ‘has *he* gone to *her*?’

‘Yes, he has gone,’ returned the old man quickly, as he narrowly watched the face of his son. ‘The poor child was naturally unhinged by her father’s sudden death, and could not travel so far alone; and as Conn was at home, and as he is soon to be her brother, why what could I do but send him to bring her here?’

The old man paused, but still his son said nothing. The contraction of agony had left his face, but still his cheeks were pale, his hands cold and clammy.

‘Antony,’ said the old man, placing his trembling hand on his son’s broad shoulder, ‘ever since you left this house two years ago, I have prayed nightly to God that the bitterness might be taken from your heart ere you came back again—yes, prayed that you two might learn to love one another, and that the curse of Cain which was for ever overhanging our house might at length be cleared away. My boy, don’t let me think that I have prayed in vain! For God’s sake, let me see you like brothers for once; let me know that you can love one another before I die!’

‘*I love Conn?*’ repeated the young man dreamily, wiping the cold perspiration which had gathered on his brow. ‘I have tried not to hate him, father, but what cause have I to love him?’

‘He is your brother!’

‘Yes, he is my brother ; and all his life his aim has been to blacken the earth for me. *He made me what I am.* If I made a friend, he stepped in and robbed me of that friend. He knew I had your affection,—he tried to alienate that ; if I won any love, he tore it from me ; he has been to me like the blight that passes over the earth, and withers up the leaves and flowers ; and yet, father, if he leaves me Alma Clifford, you shall not have prayed in vain ! I shall be able to put my hand in his and say, “Conn, *acushla* ! henceforth let us be brothers. I forgive you all !”’

With a wild, nervous, tremulous clasp, he pressed the hand which lay in his ; then he turned hurriedly, and left the room. He passed along the dimly-lighted hall, up the old oak stairs, and into a spacious old-fashioned chamber, where a turf fire was smouldering on the hearth. He threw off his saturated overcoat, sank into a chair which was drawn up beside the fire, thrust his hand into his breast, and drew forth a picture. A miniature, painted in softly tinted colours, and representing the head of a lovely girl. The face was turned upward, revealing the soft outline of throat and bust, and delicately-tinted cheeks set in a wealth of golden hair. The soft red lips were smiling, the lustrous eyes, shaded with slumbrous lids and long dark lashes, were gazing full into the dark silent face which bent above. All round the room the wind wailed, and upon the windows rattled the heavy drops of rain ; through the halls of the old castle the faint sounds of music were wafted, mingled with the merry laughter of boys and girls.

Seen in the dim light of the room, Antony Ross looked handsome enough ; but his head was set low down behind his shoulders, his breast protruded, and his back had a decided hump. This defect of his figure had told upon his health, so that he was strangely pale for a man accustomed to face sun and wind in all weathers.

Scarcely hearing, and utterly indifferent, the young master of the old house sat alone gazing at the picture in

his hand. Presently his head bent down lower, and with burning lips he kissed the cold shining glass.

‘My Alma!’ he murmured. ‘My hope, my love, my life,—yes, with *you* by my side I could forgive him; but if he came between you and me, I think that I should kill him!’

II.

While the eyes of the picture were gazing into the dark face of the man who sat alone in the lonely room, the eyes of the original of that picture were lowered before the gaze of another man. Miss Clifford and her escort Conn Ross having been overtaken by the storm which raged a whole day and night along the north-west coast, had been compelled to break their journey, and seek shelter in a village which lay some twenty miles from Kildare Castle. When, therefore, the shadows of night fell upon the land, when the wind was moaning, the rain pouring, the sea raging, she sat in warmth and comfort reclining listlessly in an easy-chair, her companion by her side.

Conn was a young man of about two-and-twenty, tall and shapely, with broad, powerful shoulders and a finely moulded head and face. His features were Grecian in outline, his cheeks faintly tanned with the sun; a fair moustache shaded his mouth, and his head was covered with a wealth of nut-brown hair. He had so often heard that he was the handsomest fellow in Connaught that he had at length accepted the belief that, take him all in all, there were few to approach him; hence, therefore, that air of perfect self-confidence and calm self-contentment, which in many other men would have been an offence. In Conn, however, there was such an air of simple manliness and *bonhomie* as to disarm all severity, and win affection for him wherever he went.

Alma Clifford sat in her chair, ostensibly holding her red-slippered feet before the blaze of the fire, but covertly

studying the face of her companion. They had been silent for some time ; suddenly she spoke,—

‘Do you know, Mr Ross, when I first saw you I thought you were Antony!’

He looked up quickly, then he threw back his head and laughed gaily.

‘You don’t say so!’ he exclaimed ; and at his merriment the girl’s face fell.

‘Well,’ she returned, more tartly, ‘there was nothing in that to make you laugh so ! He is your brother, and I think you all resemble each other !’

Conn did not reply this time. At this bold assertion both his merriment and his speech seemed to have got a sudden check.

‘When I saw him last,’ continued the girl, ‘I was certainly only ten years old, and at that age one does not notice much, but it seems to me, from what I remember of him, that he must be very like you.’

Again she glanced half eagerly towards him, but his head was turned away and he said nothing.

‘Well, am I not right?’ she continued impatiently, for there was something in his manner which annoyed her ; ‘are you not considered like each other?’

He rose abruptly, walked up and down the room, with his face still averted, and replied,—

‘Well, yes, now you mention it, I suppose we are.’

Presently he ceased walking, drew his chair up beside her, and asked, bending low and looking into her face,—

‘Well, Alma, are you satisfied?’

‘Yes,’ she answered dreamily.

He smiled, but her face remained grave. At that moment her gaze was riveted on the past, and she saw standing before her a lad with flashing dark eyes and bright handsome face, who said, ‘Good-bye, Alma, good-bye ; you are my little sweetheart, remember, and when I am a man I shall come and marry you.’ How she had loved that child, and though she had not seen him for eight long, weary years, how the memory of that last parting still made her heart beat.

It was the memory of that time which had made her so pliant to her father's wishes, so ready, nay, almost eager to give the promise which he asked.

'Alma, my darling,' he had said, 'promise me that, when I am laid to rest, you will travel back to Ireland and marry young Antony Ross.'

And Alma, bending low and slipping her hand into his, had whispered,—

'Dear father, I promise !'

And with those words ringing in his ears, he uttered a sigh, and passed away.

A few days later, when Colonel Clifford was laid to rest, his will was opened, and Alma found herself a tolerably rich woman. One-half of his large fortune was left to her unconditionally, the other half 'to Antony Ross, to pass into his possession on the day of his marriage with my beloved daughter Alma. If the marriage does not take place, the whole to remain the property of Alma alone.'

How Alma had smiled when she heard that, for she said to herself, 'Antony is safe.'

She had seen fine faces, had many handsome wooers in her life, but her heart had remained faithful to her boy lover. Though she had not seen him for so long, letters had come telling her of his struggles, his hopes and fears, and always ending with a picture of the bright future which they would one day share together. 'My Alma,' he wrote only a short time before, 'my own bright, beautiful girl, you are the one golden thread which binds me to this world. You are my salvation; without the knowledge of your truth and love, life would be a blank to me—I should think it best to lie down and die !' And yet, though he loved her so, he had never once, during all those years, expressed a wish to look upon her face.

'Have you never thought it strange that Antony shouldn't have come to see you all these years ?'

The voice that was speaking so close to her, uttering, as it were, her thoughts aloud, startled her. She flushed

slightly, then, after a while, answered composedly enough,—

‘Yes, I have sometimes thought it curious ; but again, when I have reflected, my suspicions have seemed so unjust that I have crushed them away. His love for me has not died ; indeed I think that every year it has grown stronger, and since that is so, why, I have nothing to fear.’

Conn raised his eyes and looked at the lovely face which was turned towards the fire, and lit by the faint fire-glow.

It was the very counterpart of the picture. The rounded cheek, the delicately curved mouth and nostril, the large, lustrous violet eyes, shaded by black lashes. The crape bands which had bound her hair were loosened, and the glittering threads of hair fell in a shimmering veil about her shoulders, brightening and darkening in the faint firelight. As the young man gazed at her, a perplexed expression crossed his countenance.

‘By the way, have you got a portrait of Antony?’ he asked suddenly.

‘No!’

‘And you have never seen him since you were ten years old?’

‘Have I not told you so?’

‘But he has surely seen you?’

‘I think not. I sent him a painted miniature of myself, and he wrote it was just what he had imagined me to be. It was the same, yet not the same—he had left me a lovely child, I had grown to a lovely woman!’

The words were spoken not vainly but dreamily, as if the thoughts of the speaker were still buried in the past.

There was silence between them for a time. Presently Conn spoke again,—

‘Your father was anxious for you two to marry, was he not?’

‘Yes—very. It was mainly through him that we were betrothed as children—and on the morning of the

day when he went out to meet his death, 'he was talking of my marriage with Antony, and he told me then that the reason he was so fond of Antony was because—because of the great love he had once borne to Antony's mother. She was not your mother, was she?'

'No. I believe she died when Antony was born!'

'Ah! it was your mother who brought all the money to Kildare Castle then. Do you know that papa has left Antony the half of all he had?—though, indeed, he need not have done so, since what is mine is his.'

'You are not married to him yet,' said Conn softly.

'No, not yet,' she answered; 'but it's almost the same thing, you know—I have known Antony so long. Why, I saw you for the first time the day before yesterday, and yet, because you are Antony's brother, I feel that you are mine!'

He laughed lightly.

'That makes it very nice to be Antony's brother,' he said. 'But,' he added to himself, 'I would rather be Antony.'

Nevertheless, he found it pleasant for the time being to be what he was, since it gave him the privilege of being near to her.

'I wonder why he laughed so when I said he was like Antony?' thought Alma, when she was alone that night. 'He admitted afterwards that I was right, and yet he still looked amused. It must have been because I had forgotten whether he was fair or dark. Of course he is dark—very dark. His hair is black, so are his eyes; but in every other respect he must be very like Conn.'

All that night the wind blew violently, but in the morning the storm had ceased. The travellers started early, for now that they had got so far, they both seemed eager to reach their journey's end.

As the car rolled on, taking them after every mile through wilder and more desolate scenes, the girl grew strangely silent. Wild thoughts chased each other through her brain—thoughts of how she was to meet

this man with whom she felt so familiar, and yet so strange. She knew him, and yet she did not know him; the picture of him which she had loved all these years was still vividly before her. But now she was near her journey's end, she felt that the reality would be strange to her indeed. She was at length awakened from her dream by her companion singing aloud,—

‘To the Currach of Kildare
The boys they will repair,
And Lord Edward will be there,
Says the Shan Van Vocht!’

‘Look, Alma!’ continued Conn, suddenly stopping his song, ‘the boys have seen us, and no mistake, and carried the news to the castle. Can’t you see Kildare? There it is, look—close by. Are you cold? We shall soon be safely housed now. What a throng of ragamuffins round the door! I must throw them a handful of coppers, I suppose. By Jove! they mean to honour you. Look at the bonfire on the castle cliff! There’s our old family standard waving from the battlements! There’s Father Shamus, God bless him! and—by Jupiter! there’s Antony.’

‘Antony!—where?’ she asked, rising excitedly to her feet. But Conn put his arms around her and drew her down again.

‘Don’t get excited,’ he whispered, ‘and don’t look—yet!’

Five minutes afterwards the car stopped, and Conn lifted her down.

By this time her excitement was tremendous. She stood pale and trembling, conscious only of the wild, ragged crowd which surrounded her.

‘Welcome to Kildare,’ whispered Conn, adding quickly, ‘see, here is Antony to welcome you too.’

Then, and not till then, the girl became aware that a figure was approaching her with eager, outstretched arms. She suddenly grew cold and sick.

‘Is this Antony?’ she gasped unconsciously, drawing close to her companion’s side.

‘Yes, Alma, I am Antony,’ answered the man. As he spoke he looked at her; his cheek grew white as death; he made no further attempt to approach her, but staggered back like a drunken man.

III.

There is silence in and around Kildare—the silence of complete repose. The ragged crowd dispersed several hours ago, and now the shivering creatures are all shut up, like beavers, in their little mud huts; the car which took home the priest has returned, and at length all the inmates of the castle are at rest.

All?—no, there is one at least beneath the castle roof that night to whose wearied brain rest will not come; indeed, it seems to Alma that her mind will never be at peace again.

After the first shock produced by the sight of her lover was over, she had conquered herself sufficiently to enter the castle with a smile upon her lips and in her eyes; she had composedly given her cheek for the old man’s caress; she had answered his tender inquiries about her father, her journey, herself; and she had laughed merrily, though somewhat hysterically, at the funny stories told by the priest; but the moment she found herself alone, she sat down in a strange, bewildered way, and tried to think.

But she could not think. She felt like one weary unto death. Her head was aching; her heart was beating; her hands were cold as ice. The deep silence of the house oppressed her; she threw open her window, and leaning out upon the sill, listened to the wild sobbing of the sea.

It was a calm still night, scarce a breath was stirring; the heavens were black—dark, but ever and anon a star peeped out from amid the troubled masses of cloud

which covered the sky ; the air was very cold—it touched her burning cheek and lips, and gently stirred the masses of rippling gold which lay upon her shoulders. How the sea was moaning after the wild trouble of the storm ! The waters surged in and out of the caverns, and the white foam was beaten about the cliffs.

And so Alma had seen her lover ; at last she had come face to face with the man whose image had filled her soul for so many years ; and what then ? She recalled his letters, one by one, and each one seemed to be a dagger piercing her heart. She thought of the love, the wild, consuming passion of which those letters spoke, and the memory made her heart sick. A vision of her lover, deformed and sinister as she had seen him that night, flashed across her brain, and she covered her eyes, as if to shut out the sight, and moaned.

She rose from the window, and turned away ; she would think no more. Her hands were burning feverishly now, her cheeks and lips were like fire. Leaving the window open, for the air of the room seemed stifling, she threw herself, dressed as she was, upon the bed, and closed her eyes. At last she slept. Slept and dreamed,—for in her sleep she seemed to be flying wildly through desolate wastes, and as she went she heard footsteps pursuing her, and turning, she saw that face—pale as when she last had seen it—weary, haggard, and wild. The great black eyes were burning upon hers, the arms were extended, while the livid lips murmured ‘My Alma !’ At the sight she screamed and fled the faster, but the figure came swiftly on. Suddenly she saw that huge caverns were opening all around her,—she heard wild cataracts moaning, and felt the icy touch of the wind. Again she glanced backward, when she saw that the dark figure was still pursuing her, the white face coming nearer and nearer to hers ; the arms were extended now, and about to clasp her, and she shrieked aloud and woke. Awoke to feel the bitter wind blowing upon her, to hear the wild sobbing of the sea without.

She arose, and looked wildly around her.

She had been sleeping for hours. The ashes of the fire lay dead and cold upon the hearth, and now the room was flooded with the cold, white light of day. Her head was aching worse than ever; she felt feverish and unrefreshed, but she would not sleep again; the memory of her dream made her tremble, as if she were afraid. She closed her window, and at once proceeded mechanically enough, and with little thought of her appearance, to make her toilet for the day. When this was done, she opened her door and listened. No one was astir. She put on her hat and jacket, then softly descended the stairs, and left the house.

A dreary landscape surrounded Kildare Castle, and before it was the sweep of the open sea. The old standard, a strip of green decorated with a harp of gold, hung like a limp rag above the battlements, and the cold, bare walls looked very chilly, set as they were in a dark background of bogland and mist. For miles around stretched black, boggy wastes, desolate as the wastes of her dream, relieved only by mouldering greystone walls and wretched hovels of mud and straw. Far away, like a white face staring at her from the bog, she saw a little chapel, and near to it, crouching beneath its wing, the tumbledown residence of Father Shamus. Although it was still early, wretched figures, male and female, clad in picturesque rags, and carrying creels upon their backs, were trudging hither and thither across the bog, and one or two currachs were sailing, like black specks, upon the sea. All was placid, cold and grey. The waters of the sea were peaceful, save where the great black caverns sucked them in, then cast them back a mass of seething foam; but far away, where the bogland rose to hills, the mist fell, veiling the topmost peaks, and darkening into a threatening line along the horizon.

Taking mechanically a path which led along the cliffs, Alma walked slowly on. She was still too dazed to think, but her large, lustrous eyes dreamily swept the scene around her. She looked at the white gulls which came hovering in the air above her, at the black cormorants

which darkened the rocks below, and she listened dreamily to the washing of the waves, and opened her lips to drink in the keen fresh air, but all the while her soul was far away. Presently she paused and looked back.

There, on the summit of the hill, stood Kildare Castle, its chimneys now sending forth thin lines of blue smoke, the folds of its tattered standard shaken out by the rising breeze, and waving faintly. Then she sat down on a boulder which lay close to the edge of the high cliff, and turned her face towards the sea.

How long she remained thus she did not know. Her trance at length was broken by the sound of a human voice.

‘So I have found you at last,’ it said. ‘Do you know I have been searching about for the last half-hour, and when I could not find you, I began to think that you had run away?’

IV.

Alma did not require to raise her eyes to recognise the speaker ; she knew that the rich, full-toned voice belonged to Conn.

Yes, there he stood, looking handsomer than ever that morning, with the flush of health on his brown cheek, the light of laughter in his bright blue eyes. How tall and fair, and powerful he was ; and this morning he seemed to hold himself erect and throw up his head with a prouder air than usual ; and when, in his merry, courteous way, he raised his right hand and swept off his hat, the sunlight, struggling faintly through the dewy mist, just touched with gold his clustering curls of hair, while the breeze swept caressingly across his bold white brow !

As Alma, raising her eyes, beheld him, she felt her pale face flush, then with a quick, almost petulant movement, she turned her head away, and took no notice whatever of his extended hand.

‘Why, what is the matter?’ asked Conn, taking a seat on the cliff before her, and thrusting his rejected hand

into the pocket of his coat; and then seeing that her lips were quivering, her eyes filling with tears, he added quickly,—‘Alma, what have I done to pain you?’

‘It is not what you have done, but what you have *not* done!’ returned the girl. ‘Do you think it was fair, or kind, or generous to bring me here, and never say a word? I did not expect you to be generous to me; but he is your brother, you might have spared him!’

All the brightness faded from Conn’s face, he took the girl’s hand, and bent earnestly over her.

‘Alma,’ he said, ‘if you knew all you would not speak to me like that, and if—if you were not what you are I should walk away back to Kildare and say nothing; perhaps it might be the wisest plan, but I can’t do it—I couldn’t bear to be misjudged by you. You say I should have spoken; if I had, what then? You would never have come to Kildare, Antony would have said I had separated you, and God only knows there might have been bloodshed between us!’

He felt the little hand tremble in his grasp, the cheeks went pale as death, but Alma did not answer.

‘A week ago,’ continued Conn quietly, ‘it was a matter of perfect indifference to me whom Antony married, but when I saw you I was amazed, for I thought you *knew*; afterwards, when I found you did not, I could not speak, for I thought she shall see for herself, and then she will be satisfied to end the farce and return!’

The girl’s face went paler still; she rose excitedly to her feet.

‘You think a life-long tie can be so easily broken? You think the love which has filled our hearts for years can be cast aside like an old gown, and forgotten?’

‘Pardon me,’ said Conn quietly. ‘I never said that Antony would change; he has no cause, he has got the best of the bargain!’

‘Then you confine the heartlessness to *me*. You think that because Antony is—well, what he is, I should be justified in saying, “My dream is over; our compact is at an end. Good-bye!”’

‘Yes,’ said Conn boldly, ‘I think you would be justified!’

Alma did not reply this time, for the memory of last night came back upon her and turned her heart sick. Were not these the very thoughts which had come unbidden to her brain? Had she not said to herself over and over again: ‘If the shock has killed my love it is no wonder. I have not met my lover, the handsome, brave man whom I have dreamed of all these years, but a monster who has taken his name, and whom I cannot love, and since this is so, why let the blame rest with him who has allowed me to indulge in a dream, which he knew must sooner or later be so cruelly dispelled.’ All she did was to turn away her face and murmur faintly,—

‘He cannot help being what he is.’

‘No,’ said Conn, ‘he can’t help it, sure enough, but he should have been man enough to tell you years ago!’

Again the echo of her thought. Alma felt her heart pulsating madly, but she turned now and looked her companion in the face.

‘Perhaps we had better not talk any more about Antony,’ she said; and Conn, shrugging his shoulders, cordially endorsed her words.

‘It can’t be a pleasant subject to either of us,’ he said; ‘but promise me this, Alma, that whatever happens between you two, *we* shall ever remain friends!’

‘Yes, I promise,’ returned Alma quietly. Then she took his proffered arm, and walked with him along the cliffs towards Kildare Castle.

The day had brightened hour by hour, and now the sun had drawn the mist from the hills, and was shining brightly on the bogs and on the sea.

The seagulls screamed still above them, and the great cormorants flapped their black wings on the rocks below.

The waters were troubled, for the yawning caverns sucked them up still, and spat out the hissing foam, which spread like a white shroud upon the sea. Walking thus, supported by a strong arm, conscious of a protecting presence near, and surrounded by the glory

and mystery of such a scene, Alma's troubled soul grew more at peace.

Presently she raised her eyes to his face, and as she did so her pale cheek flushed. That quick movement of the head had told her that they were now beneath the shadow of Kildare Castle, and as she raised her eyes they met a pair of flashing black orbs which were gazing from the window above. What had happened to the morning? had a blight passed over the land? Alma shuddered as she entered the castle door.

'Alma, my little darling! is it really you? Last night I dreamed that you were taken from me, and when I woke this morning I thought the dream must augur ill; but now I hold your hand and see your face, I laugh at such shadowy warnings, and feel they are quite untrue!'

The betrothed lovers were alone at last—alone in the great dining-hall of Kildare Castle, with the faint, misty light stealing in upon them through the open window, and silence all around. He stood before her holding her hands, clasping them with a feverish, passionate clasp, although they lay like lead.

'My little darling!' he said, pressing her hand still tighter, 'when you shrank away from me last night, I thought you had dealt my death-blow; see what a coward love makes of a man! and for the first time I felt sorry that you did not know.'

'Why did you not tell me?' asked the girl faintly, and Antony replied,—

'Because I was afraid!—yes, afraid! for I tell you love has made a coward of me. Listen, Alma! When first I found that I was maimed and crippled, I thought, "I will say nothing,—if I do, her love may die, and then death to me too! This cannot last for ever. In two or three years I shall be right again, and then little Alma will bless me for sparing her the knowledge of so much pain!"'

He paused as if expecting a reply, but none came. Alma's cheeks grew paler in the faint grey light which

suffused her face and form ; her hands were cold and tremulous ; her heart grew fainter in her breast. She stood silent for a time, conscious of his feverish clasp, his burning, eager look ; then with an effort she raised her eyes, and forced her cold lips to speak.

‘But afterwards,’ she said, ‘when you found that you were changed for life, why did you not tell me?’

‘Why? Well, because I was a fool then as well as a coward. I should have told you all I know, but you had grown dearer to me than my life, and I could not risk the chance of losing you. Oh, my darling, if it hadn’t been for you, God only knows what I might have become! Mine has been a hard life, Alma. Sometimes I have sat down and thought, “Where is the use of all this struggle, and turmoil, and pain? Why not end it?” and then the thought of you came back upon me, and I knew there was one to sweeten life’s bitter cup even for *me*!’

He paused again, and this time the silence was broken by Alma’s sobs. The room was shrouded in darkness now, save where the faint grey light fell about the window and the door. Alma could not see her lover, but the gentle pathos of his words, the passionate ring of his voice, had touched a tender chord and stirred up the memory of years.

‘You should have trusted me!’ she sobbed, bowing her head upon his arm. ‘How could you value my love, when you thought it would die so soon?’

As her face touched his arm, his whole body trembled like a leaf. He gently put his arm around her.

‘Alma,’ he said, ‘I never thought your love would die,—if I had, the farce would have been ended years ago!’

‘And yet you did not trust me?’

‘And yet I did not trust you! I could not. My hand would not write the words—my lips would not utter them. But that is past and gone. You have seen, my darling, you know, and still I hold you here!’

She was still sobbing ; her face was buried on his shoulder, his arm clasped round her.

‘ Since that day when I looked in the mirror, and saw and knew the truth, I have never had the heart to say a prayer. All the kindliness of my nature was turned to gall, Alma, and I cursed instead of prayed ! But to-night I shall say a prayer. God is good ! I have not suffered in vain. My trials were all as nought compared with the blessing which He has given me now ! ’

With an effort Alma conquered her sobs, and, raising her eyes, looked into his. She stretched out her arms towards him ; her lips were open to speak the answer to his prayer, when suddenly the moon burst forth in all her splendour, and her light pouring in a flood through the window, lit up a figure which stood outside. It was Conn, bareheaded, dressed negligently in a suit of grey tweed, and smoking a cigar. As he strolled past the window, he was carelessly singing a song,—

‘ I’ll leave my people, both friend and foe,
From all the girls in the world I’ll go ;
But from you, sweetheart, oh, never, oh no,
Till I’ll lie in the coffin stretched cold and low.
Then, Ora, come with me, come with me, come with me,
Ora, come with me, brown girl sweet ;
And oh I would go through snow and sleet,
If you would come with me, brown girl sweet ! ’

As the figure passed into the darkness and the voice faded away, Alma’s arms fell powerless by her side, and the words upon her lips remained unspoken.

During these two interviews, both of the brothers had omitted to mention one important fact,—Conn had remained silent from a certain sense of shame, Antony because he wished to spare his brother. Therefore, Alma was kept in ignorance of the fact, that it was no other indeed than Conn who had dealt the blow which had deformed his brother for life.

V.

A period of gloomy weather succeeded Alma’s arrival at Kildare. First the rain fell, then white mists covered

the hill-tops, and a damp cold wind blew in from the troubled sea.

It was very dreary in the daytime, but drearier still at night. Often as Alma lay in her bed she was awakened from troublesome dreams by the breaking of the waves below, the low moaning of the wind, or the whining of the dogs chained in the courtyard. Conn was away from home. He had left the castle on a fishing expedition among the hills, and was not expected to return for several days; but Antony was there, and day after day he was ever at her side, either on the hills or the sea.

Despite his care, each day found the girl's cheeks a shade paler. Her mind was restless and ill at ease. It seemed to her that the sunlight had never penetrated into those gloomy regions, either to brighten the landscape or the dismal lives of those who dwelt upon the land. A dreary people they seemed to her, with hearts of lead and heavy mournful eyes, content to live, and toil, and die, so long as the roof above them remained the same, and they were sure of having the waves break upon the sands hard by their graves.

The strange, dark, gloomy eyes of these people—savages she called them—seemed to haunt her out of hope, their low monotonous voices to ring ominously in her ears. She was beginning to get fanciful too, and to imagine that the dreary old castle was haunted. Often as she lay awake at night, she fancied she heard the rushing of feet along the corridors; strange cold winds seemed to be wafted about her room, bringing her the echo of dreary moans.

In these days, if she had had any one at hand in whom she could have confided, she might have cast aside these dreary fancies, and with an effort have shaken off the fear which was creeping so coldly about her heart as if to still its beating.

But she had no one.

She shrank from the thought of confiding in Bridget, the housekeeper of Kildare Castle; Mr Ross, the master, would, she felt sure, look at her in such a way as to

quench her confidence at the very outset ; and of Antony she had almost grown afraid. Why, she did not know. She only felt that she was amongst a race of people who seemed to be of a different species to others she had known, and that the strangest and most unsympathetic of all was the man whom she had come there to marry.

‘Where was Conn?’ she asked herself again and again. ‘Why had he gone and left her there?’ He was the only human being who seemed earthly, and yet he had departed and left her there alone. Was that short happy time which she had spent with him only a dream? Was she destined never to see his face again?’

Once, she had ventured to mention his name to Antony, but as she had done so, a look so sinister had darkened his face, that she had grown more and more afraid. And so the gulf which was separating them seemed to widen. After that she had not dared to mention Conn’s name, but she thought of him more and more, and wondered at the hatred which his brother seemed to bear him.

But if she did not confide in her lover, she could not altogether conceal her sorrow from him. He watched the roses gradually fade from her cheeks, the brightness from her eyes ; as her reserve increased his face grew darker. At last he took the initiative, and tried to gain her confidence himself.

It was one evening when they were walking together towards Kildare. A couple of hours before they had left the castle in bright sunshine, but now a thick cold mist enveloped them like a shroud. Alma could feel it clinging to her clothes and hair, and she shivered violently.

‘Alma,’ said her lover, bending towards her, and taking her cold hands in his,—‘Alma, my darling, when are we to marry?’

The girl started ; her heart seemed suddenly to stand still ; she uttered a faint cry, and paused trembling.

‘What is the matter?’ he cried anxiously, and at this

the girl tried to force a smile, but only shivered, and cast a weary look about her.

‘I must have been dreaming,’ she said, ‘when your voice awoke me! See how I tremble; had we not better hasten home, for I am so cold?’

The rain indeed was gathering thicker and thicker around them, the silence was broken only by the low moaning of the sea. They walked on. Alma could see the black tower of the castle looming through the mist when her lover spoke again.

‘Well, Alma,’ he said, more gravely this time, ‘you have not answered my question,—When will you let me call you wife?’

She was not looking at him, she seldom did that now; but he was watching her, and he saw that a look of positive pain passed across her face; in a moment it was gone.

‘Let me think,’ she murmured; ‘I will tell you another time—to-morrow, it’s so very sudden!’

‘Sudden!—when we have waited all these years! Sudden! when you came to Kildare to marry me!’

‘Ah, yes, it is foolish of me,’ she said. ‘Papa would not have wished for any delay. Let it be whenever you please, Antony! You have waited long enough, God knows!’

As she uttered the words, the two drew near to the door of Kildare Castle; the great black turrets of the place seemed creeping towards her as if eager to fold her in their arms. Alma ran up to her room, and, having gained its solitude, stood with both her hands pressing her aching head. She could still hear the sea moaning, and presently she saw that her window was open, the mist driving in; she closed it, then she pressed her forehead against the cold glass, and stood with closed eyes. Presently the sound of a gong echoed through the house and roused her. She put off her damp clothes, mechanically washed her face and hands, and smoothed her hair, and descended the stairs.

Her head was still full of strange sounds, and she was

not able to see clearly. All the lights seemed dim, and everything was unreal. She was aware of being in the dining-room, with her dinner before her, of two male figures being near her, but she was only half-conscious of what she was doing.

Suddenly a burst of hearty laughter rang through the house, and she started as if from a dream.

‘Conn, my boy, you’re just in time,’ said Mr Ross, as the dining-room door flew open, and Conn, looking handsomer than ever, stepped into the room.

He smilingly nodded to his father and Antony, but walked towards Alma with outstretched hand. She felt her face flushing, her lips smiling, as their hands were clasped together.

‘Oh, I am so glad you have come,’ she said; then, as she turned to resume her seat, she met the eyes of her lover, which had been fixed upon her gloomily, with an expression of sinister suspicion.

When she found herself alone that night she did not seek her rest; she sat down before the turf fire, and began to think.

‘I was weak and foolish,’ she said, ‘just as I was that night when I told him, oh, my God! that my love was unchanged. He believed in me then, he believes in me now. I am not fit to be tried like this! He cannot be my Antony. I have looked at him, and I cannot find a single trace, and yet he is going to be my husband!’

VI.

From the moment of Conn’s return, the life at Kildare Castle underwent a pleasant change. It seemed to Alma at least that the young man’s coming was like a burst of summer sunshine after a long spell of wintry fog and rain.

All that night she slept well, and in the morning,

when she drowsily opened her eyes, she heard his voice singing gay scraps of song, she saw the sunlight struggling for entrance at her window ; and then, when the sound of the voice died, she heard for the first time the musical murmur of the sea as it washed peacefully upon the shore. It sounded quite glad and happy, *now*.

She bestowed extra pains upon her toilet that day, and was pleased at the result. When she entered the breakfast-room she found bunches of purple heather and wild thyme placed beside her plate, and she knew instinctively that Conn had been out on the cliff to gather flowers for her. When Conn, taking her hand in his, raised it to his lips, she smiled and blushed prettily beneath his gaze : but her face became ghastly pale when Antony, advancing from the shadow, looked in her eyes and placed her chair. What was the meaning of that look she asked herself again and again ? why was it that it made her so heart-sick, and turned her cheek so pale ? why was it that it tempted her to shrink from her lover, and draw her chair ever so little nearer to that of Conn ? Alma never forgot that look. Years afterwards she recalled it with the same secret horror as had filled her breast that bright summer morning.

Meanwhile, Conn, unconscious of what was going on between his brother and the fair young creature to whom he was betrothed, plied his knife and fork in a manner which augured well for the healthiness of the mountain air. Now and again he paused to offer some polite brotherly attention to Alma, and to give her a look and a smile which made her blush. She was vexed she could not keep her cheeks cool, for she felt instinctively that Antony was still looking at her, noting in sullen silence every change which flitted over her face.

The girl was beginning to find her old dread of Antony deepening into positive indignation, and on the whole she felt that the meal would have been a pleasanter one if he had found it convenient to remain that morning in his own room. However, at length the meal was finished. Conn pulled down his hat from a peg in the hall, whistled

up his dogs, asked Alma if she would like to accompany him in a stroll on the beach, and, on her assenting, the two walked off together.

She had asked Antony if he would go with them, but her lips, not her heart had spoken, and he had refused. As he did so he saw that the brightness of her face, which for a moment had faded, returned.

It was very pleasant to wander along the shore with Conn, and ere Alma had gone many yards she entirely forgot the existence of the moody man who was shut up in the castle, following with jealous eyes the two figures as they passed side by side along the sand. She felt as if a shadow had been lifted from her soul, as if a sunbeam had suddenly shot from heaven bringing with it brightness to the sea, and peace and happiness to every living thing.

From that day the girl's drooping spirits seemed to revive, and the morbid fancies which before had assailed her gradually passed away. She no longer quaked and trembled at every sound. She slept peacefully during the night, a sleep which was unharassed by dreams, and during the dusk of the evening she was not afraid to pass along the broad corridors alone. She was learning to love the music of the waves, the sweet breath from the hills. She was beginning to feel that to be the mistress of Kildare Castle was not so dark a prospect after all.

But what had come over Antony? In her newly-found happiness Alma had forgotten to note her lover, but now and then his existence was forced upon her, and at such times it seemed that a shadow had crossed her sunshine. For amidst all this change Antony was changing too. Jealousy was gnawing at his heart, and converting the man into a devil. Alma did not notice it, but Conn did, and he shrank from the looks which sometimes crossed his brother's face.

A family tragedy was pending, that was certain.

Conn determined to avoid it, even although the doing so involved the sacrifice of himself. For he knew now, that to leave Alma would involve a tremendous sacrifice.

The girl had wound her way into his careless heart, and made him love as he had thought himself incapable of loving. At first he had admired her for the firmness with which she held to her bond, and he had gone away to avoid temptation, and to uproot from his heart the slight tenderness with which her beauty had already inspired him; but when he returned and saw her so pale and sad, he had felt pity, and since then his pity had melted into a strange sympathy. The change had been so gradual, that for a time he himself did not notice it. But one day, as he was gazing into the hall mirror, he met Antony's eyes steadfastly regarding him, and that look awakened him to his danger.

Conn remained in his room all that afternoon, and in the evening after dinner, when his father had dropped asleep in his chair, and Antony had left the room, he took Alma out on to the terrace to show her the new moon; then he told her with outward composure, but inward trembling, that he was going away again.

'Going away?' said the girl faintly, her cheek turning very pale.

'Yes,' continued Conn, manfully repressing the inclination which was strong upon him, to kiss her pale cheek and enfold her trembling body in his arms. 'I am going for a raid among the mountains again, and I start to-morrow morning, but I mean to get back before your wedding-day.'

Conn ceased, and Alma still said nothing. Her face was white as death, and her eyes were fixed upon the pale ray of moonlight which fell faintly upon the sea: she still kept her trembling hand on Conn's arm, but her thoughts were travelling back over that dreary desert of days which she had spent in Kildare Castle while Conn was absent.

She raised her face to his.

'Don't go,' she said, 'if you have any care, any pity for me: don't go again, and leave me here *alone*. I couldn't bear it. I should go mad, or kill myself,—it wouldn't much matter which.'

Conn's hand trembled. Was it possible that Alma loved him? If so, his was a sacrifice indeed.

'Alma,' he said, bending over her, 'Antony remains here.'

The girl started and bit her lip; she could not raise her eyes to his, for they were full of tears.

'Since you are bent on going,' she said, 'I suppose we had better say good-bye,' and she held forth her hand. He took it in both of his, and drew her towards him again.

'Alma,' he said, 'you know, or you ought to know, that I would give my life to save *you* pain.'

'Then you will stay?' she said quickly.

'Yes, if you wish it, I will stay a little.' Then bending over her he asked softly,—'Was it so very dreary when I was away?'

The girl shuddered and clung close to his arm.

'Never mind what it was,' she said forcing a laugh, 'so long as it is not to be so again. If you had gone off again as you did before, I would never have forgiven you!'

Conn took her hand and pressed it softly. At that moment Mr Ross's voice was heard calling, and the two stepped into the room.

They were both astonished to see Antony sitting in an easy-chair close to the window. For a moment Conn turned rather faint, but when he looked again at his brother, he saw that he was fast asleep.

· So at least he seemed.

VII.

So Conn remained, and somehow, since that short interview on the balcony, the subtle charm of his presence was increased tenfold. Outwardly they remained the same. They still took their solitary walks along the seashore, or among the desolate bogs; but often during these lonely rambles Antony appeared, and almost

forcibly demanded that the girl should go with him, and Alma yielded, knowing as she did so, that after a brief walk with her lover she could spend all the evening with Conn. For they still played and sang together, while Mr Ross took his *siesta* in his easy-chair, and Antony from his shaded nook by the fire watched them gloomily. As each day passed, Antony's face grew darker and darker, and the keenly watched pair began to be afraid to exchange a word. And even when they found themselves alone they were tongue-tied—full of feelings that would not bear utterance.

Alma knew her weakness, and still she yielded. Every night, in the solitude of her chamber, she recalled the face of Conn. Every morning she came down dreading, yet half hoping, that Conn might be gone ; yet, when his handsome face appeared before her, the joyful look in her eyes was unmistakable.

It was this soft look of sympathy bestowed upon him, at least once a day, that kept Conn at Kildare. He knew he was playing a dangerous game, but for the first time in his life he felt within him the sweet mysterious thrills of love, and when his eyes spoke what his lips would not betray, he read the answer in the eyes of his brother's expectant bride.

But Antony loved Alma, and it was this thought which appalled Conn—this thought alone which kept him silent whenever he found himself alone with the girl. By breathing a word to her he knew that he might crush the one hope which had kept his injured brother alive for years.

One day the announcement was made that strangers were coming to the castle. Two gentlemen from Dublin, who claimed Mr Ross's hospitality through their acquaintance with his son. Alma did not know whether she was glad or sorry, but she affected gladness, and determined to vary the monotony of her existence by giving her small aid to Bridget.

So, for one day at least, the three principal actors in our story were parted. Antony went to meet his friends,

Conn roamed off with gun and dogs, while Alma wandered from room to room, doing her best to make the dreary old castle look gay.

She begged the help of Bridget with her toilet that night, and when it was complete she descended, looking prettier than she had done for months. She was late, and when she pushed open the drawing-room door she saw that most of the company was there. She could see Father Shamus and the curate at the far end of the room. Mr Ross and Antony were eagerly talking with two strange men. Her eyes wandered over to the hearth and rested upon Conn, who looked like a young Adonis in his elegant suit of black.

Alma paused in confusion, and gazed round appealingly at Conn, then Antony came forward with outstretched hand, and the next moment she felt her fingers enclosed in a cold firm grip, while he presented her to the strangers.

Was it only fancy, or did she see them start, gaze from her to Antony, from her to Conn, and then glance significantly into each other's eyes? No, it could not be fancy; Alma seemed to guess their thoughts, for she flushed almost angrily.

The dinner passed off well. Father Shamus was in his best mood, and the strangers talked pleasantly and well. Antony alone seemed silent, and secretly oppressed. Again and again he looked at Alma with a strange, fierce light in his eyes, which made her sick with fear. It was this feeling of dread which kept her seated when the punch was brought in, and she knew she ought to be away. She had thought it all over, and she knew that if she went to the drawing-room Antony would surely follow her; and, filled with that instinct of self-preservation, she dreaded to be alone with him that night.

So she asked leave to stay, and it was readily granted; and while the gentlemen smoked their cigars and drank their wine, and told their after-dinner stories, Alma smiled and listened well pleased, trying all the time to avoid the light which deepened in her lover's eyes.

Presently the company adjourned to the drawing-room, and then it was Alma's turn to amuse. She sang her prettiest songs to amuse the strangers, and played some quaint old Irish airs to please the priest. It was not till late in the evening, when both Father Shamus and the curate rose to go, that she wished them all good-night, and retired.

Long after the clock had struck twelve that night, Antony and the two strangers were closeted in the room known as 'Mr Antony's study.' They had evidently been talking freely, but now neither of them spoke. Antony sat plunged in deep thought, with his eyes on the fire; one of the strangers stood on the hearth, smoking a cigar; the other was idly toying with the leaves of a book; both were watching him.

Presently one spoke.

'Mr Ross, you must decide to-night.'

'So soon,' said Antony, raising his eyes from the fire.

'Not a moment is to be lost.'

'If I refuse?'

'You will in all probability be shot!'

'For the last two years I have worked for the cause zealously and well.'

'Precisely; and you have gone too far to withdraw.'

Again there was silence, then Antony spoke.

'When must I go to Dublin?'

'In a few days perhaps, at the latest in a week.'

'And when I get there?'

'You will be told your duty. The crisis has come when stern measures are needed. They will be taken.'

Again there was silence long and deep. Again Antony stared into the fire with mournful, haggard eyes. Again the two men watched him keenly. When he raised his head, he looked straight into their eyes.

'I accept,' he said. 'I will go to Dublin on one condition.'

'Name it.'

‘You must give me a full week here, because—I wish to take with me my wife!’

Love and jealousy had overthrown patriotism.

All that evening the question in Antony’s mind had not been, What work shall I have to do? but, ‘What shall I do about Alma?’ After much weary trouble and thought, he had decided that question, yet the decision seemed to bring little relief to his already disturbed mind.

During that night he walked wearily up and down his room.

In the morning he came down looking pale and weary and old. Alma, glancing at him with gentle, wondering eyes, felt extreme pity mingle with her fear; and when later in the day he asked to see her alone, she granted the request, if not with eagerness, at least without reluctance. They went into the dining-room together.

‘Alma,’ he said, taking her hands, and plunging at once into the very heart of his subject, ‘this cannot go on;—we must be married at once!’

The girl did not answer. She shivered through and through; then raising her head, she gazed into his face with patient pleading eyes, like some poor dumb brute asking for mercy from its master. She knew that the hour had come when the very inmost thoughts of her aching heart must be spoken. She looked at him long and earnestly, hoping, yet partly dreading, that he would read her thoughts, and so spare her the pain of speaking. He saw, yet he would not understand. Finding that the girl remained silent, he spoke again.

‘Listen to me! Some work I have to do calls me away. I must leave home in a week, perhaps sooner. I have settled to go, but when I go my wife must accompany me!’

This time the girl shrank fearfully from him, and dropped his hands.

‘Oh, Antony!’ she cried, ‘pity me, spare me. I—I cannot go.’

Alma !’

‘Oh, do not look at me like that. Indeed, I have tried ; yes, I have tried so hard, but I have tried in vain. Antony, forgive me ! God knows I would not willingly give you pain. I have been weak and foolish. I should have spoken before, but I did not, because—because I was afraid !’

She paused, but he said nothing. Even as she spoke he had turned away, and stood now with his elbows resting on the mantelpiece, his eyes gazing fixedly at the window.

His face was pale and convulsed with acute pain ; his lips were bloodless.

Alma was gentle-hearted, and the sight of this silent suffering stirred her to the very soul. She rose and moved towards him ; she placed her hand upon his arm, and let it rest there, almost as if she loved him.

‘Antony, speak one word, say that you forgive me. Indeed, indeed, it is better thus. The money that my father left you shall be yours just the same as if we had married, and I will respect and care for you always as a friend, and as a *brother*.’

As she uttered the last word, Antony started fiercely, and Alma, perceiving for the first time what she had said, grew crimson.

He turned, and looked at her intently, and the sight of his face made her shrink from him more than ever. He resolutely took her hand, and compelled her to look into his face.

‘Yes,’ he said slowly, ‘you have spoken the truth at last ! Conn has stolen your love from me ; it is through *him* you refuse to become my wife !’ He added more violently,—‘Don’t speak, don’t answer ! Do you think I do not know ? Haven’t I ears to hear, and eyes to see ? Well, it is only in a par with all the rest. Antony may work and slave with a will, but Conn with his cursed smiling face steps in and takes the reward. He supplanted me in my father’s heart ! *He made me what I am*. I toiled and slaved for my people here ; they scarcely gave me their gratitude, while he was set up as an idol to be

worshipped next to God. Yes, he has gathered the prizes, and left me only the blanks, and now he has stolen the only thing which gave me strength to live and endure.'

'Antony, will you not hear me?'

'No, I will not hear you; you have said your say; now, listen to me. I tell you there comes a day in every man's life when his endurance ceases. *My* day has come!—why should I strive and suffer? Why should I bow my head in obedience to the will of an unjust God? Why should I pause and hesitate, when I know that, so long as Conn is living, the world will hold neither happiness nor peace for me?'

The girl stared at him in terror; she opened her lips, but the words froze upon them; her breath came in short, quick pants, but she made no other sound.

'That night,' continued Antony, 'that cursed night! when I heard that *he*, of all men on this earth, had gone to bring you here, my heart misgave me, and I seemed to feel what there was to come. I said to myself, "If he leaves me Alma, I will forgive him all, and try to forget; but if he takes her from me, I shall *kill* him!"'

The bloodless lips quivered convulsively. With a low, tremulous cry, she threw herself into his arms, and gasped,—

'Antony, he is your brother.'

He roughly shook her from him; she staggered back and almost fell. Without one look back, he hurriedly left the room.

Dazed and heart-broken, almost as stupefied as the girl herself, he rushed from the house, and walked with wild strides across the mountain. He had not tried to question Alma's decision. Giving his own love freely, he had been too proud to appear as a suppliant for love which could not be as freely returned. But his heart grew hard, his anger and jealousy intense. His one feeling now was a deep and unholy thirst for revenge; a horrible craving to strike against the life of the man who, he believed, had struck so often and so cruelly against his own.

VIII.

Half stunned and utterly powerless, Alma remained for a time cold and silent as a stone. She had staggered back when he cast her from him, and had fallen into a chair; and now she sat with her eyes, dilated with terror, fixed upon the door through which he had passed. Was she going to faint? She feared so. She made one strong effort, rose, opened the window, and put her head half out to inhale a breath of air.

It was cold, very cold. The day was well-nigh spent; for that dull, grey look on the cliffs and on the sea told of swiftly approaching night. There was a thin drizzle in the air; but though it fell and lay like hoar frost on the girl's golden hair, she hardly seemed to heed. She only knew that the air refreshed her, that the wild burning and throbbing was gradually passing away from her brain, and that she was able to think.

'What must I do?—what must I do?' she cried wildly, pressing her hands against her aching head; 'he will kill him, and then— Oh, my God! I think that I shall die.'

The house was full of people, but she could not tell her tale to any one. Mr Ross she knew would gaze at her with mildly reproachful eyes and hush the words upon her lips; while if she told the servants, they would raise the neighbourhood with wild cries, but do absolutely nothing. What was done she alone must do, confiding in no one.

Conn was away;—he was off for the day, he told her when he had come to wish her good-bye. He had described to her the route he meant to take, and the house where he would sleep that night—a neighbour's house—only a few miles away. Yes, she knew where to find him—she must go to him now—tell him of his brother's wrath, and beg of him never to return to his home. She felt that Conn would yield, for her sake, and if he would not, why, she must go boldly back and sacrifice herself to obtain peace, by becoming Antony's wife.

She opened the door, passed swiftly through the big, empty, desolate-looking hall, and crept stealthily up to her room. She listened: all was silent. She took a cloak to wrap around her head and shoulders, then she descended the stairs again, and ran from the house.

What an evening! cold, grey, desolate, and bleak, with no gleam of sunshine anywhere. The hills were becoming dim in the shadows of oncoming night, the wind was moaning softly, and the sea was sighing as if for the drowned dead. As Alma sped onward, her eyes grew dim and her heart beat quicker and quicker. The places all around her—made familiar through her wanderings with Conn—were almost dear to her that night. For now she knew that he was in danger, now she knew that she must either bid him farewell, or see him lying dead at her feet. Her heart revealed its secret. She loved him! Yes, she loved him; though she had striven and fought against it, trying with all her woman's strength to follow the path of duty, she knew that she had failed.

With trembling limbs, and wildly palpitating heart, she sped swiftly along the highway, gazing wildly about her for the sight of a well-known form. Presently, turning a corner of the road, she saw, close to her, two men fighting for life.

One was down, the other stood above him raising a knife. With a wild shriek she sprang forward, and the knife fell upon her own breast.

I X.

When Alma opened her eyes, she found herself lying in bed in her own room at Kildare Castle. It was night apparently, for everything was so still. She lay for a time with her eyes fixed dreamily upon the ceiling, her ears listening attentively, but there came no sound. She turned her head on the pillow and looked around her. Yes, it was her own room; but how strangely changed it seemed! There was a dim light burning on the

washstand, and a smouldering red fire in the grate, and near to the fire, seated in an arm-chair, was a woman.

‘Bridget,’ said Alma softly.

The woman started, rose, and came towards the bed. It was Bridget, but how grave her face was; and surely her gentle eyes filled with tears as she bent low and kissed the girl.

‘Praise be to the Lord,’ she murmured; ‘will ye take a drink, mavourneen, and then try again to sleep?’

The girl moved uneasily, and raised her hand to push back the hair from her burning brow. What did it all mean? What had happened? Her brain was so confused and weak, she could not think—the past seemed an utter blank.

‘Bridget,’ she murmured, ‘what is the matter—what has happened—am I ill?’

Then her extreme weakness overcame her; her lips quivered, her eyes filled, and she seemed about to faint.

Bridget, seeing those signs of distress, grew more agitated. She clasped the girl’s hand and stroked her cheek as if she had been soothing a crying child.

‘Hush, mavourneen, don’t cry, for the love of God,’ she murmured. ‘No, you’re not well, machree: but just drink this, ’twill soothe ye: go to sleep now, just to please Bridget, and in the morning I’ll tell ye all.’

She took a seat beside the bed, and continued to stroke the girl’s hand gently; while Alma, completely overcome by her extreme weakness, cried quietly for a time, and then sank again into another sleep.

Bridget sat and watched.

As she saw the heavy eyes close, the beautiful lips part, and listened to the heavy measured breathing, her tears fell fast; but her heart was full of thankfulness to God. She felt that the danger was passed, and that, as Alma’s strength returned, the heavy sorrow which had hung threateningly above Kildare Castle would surely pass away.

Never would Bridget forget that night, more than a week before, when she had seen Conn enter his father’s

house with Alma's bleeding and seemingly lifeless body in his arms. For a moment the castle was in a turmoil; a mounted messenger had been despatched for the doctor; but one of the strangers from Dublin—possessing a little surgical knowledge—had dressed the wound with such rapidity as to save the girl's life. Then he had taken upon himself to telegraph to Dublin for a doctor, and the doctor had come, and after examining the wound carefully, he had said there was little chance for the girl to live. But he had stayed and tended her. And so he and many others had watched her slowly pass out of the shadow of death.

And during all this anxious time, where was Antony? He lay a prisoner in Gulranny gaol. Stricken to the heart with remorse, he had straightway given himself up to justice. And now he, the young master of Kildare, was likely to be tried for murder. No wonder Bridget's eyes grew dim; no wonder her kind heart swelled almost to bursting.

The crisis was passed, but Alma's strength did not return very quickly. For days she lay with closed eyes, only giving signs of life by regular and gentle breathing. Powerless to rise or speak, she was, nevertheless, partly conscious of what was going on around her. She was conscious of people moving in and out of the room; of kind hands clasping hers, or gently bathing her feverish brow; then she heard their voices by her bedside, and one day she was aware of being in the room alone with Conn.

He knelt down by the bed and kissed her thin, white hand, and, as he kissed, she felt his tears upon it; and though she was so weak and ill, she felt as if she had suddenly passed out of black darkness into the brightness of a summer's noon.

When Alma recovered true consciousness, she opened her eyes in the full light of day. Her room was empty, but she could hear the sound of feet moving about below, and the occasional barking of the dogs chained in the courtyard. In the grate a peat fire still burnt brightly,

and through the uncurtained window her eyes rested upon flakes of falling snow, and snow lay also in little flakes upon the window-frame; and while she lay and gazed, she could hear the sea moaning and sighing as it used to do in the old days when she first came to Kildare.

How long ago that seemed! How much had happened since then! Oh, if she could only find that it had all been a dream!

Suddenly she was conscious of some movement in the room, and, looking round, she saw that in a chair beside the bed sat Mr Ross, his grey head bowed low.

She reached out her hand and touched his.

'Mr Ross,' she said, 'dear Mr Ross, I remember everything now; I have awakened, and I remember! How long have I been lying here?—it must be very long, since winter has come. Tell me where is Antony?'

He had been gazing at her up to this; but now, with a terrible look of pain upon his face, he turned away.

'Ah, do not speak! you have told me,' she cried; 'they have taken him: but do not fear—they shall not harm him, because he has done no wrong. It was an accident—only an accident; I threw myself in his way, and got wounded—that was all. You must send to them—I will write to them—they must set your son free!'

'You will do this?—my child, can you forgive him?'

'Forgive him! Dear Mr Ross, 'tis all of you who have to forgive me. You have had nothing but misery about you since I came to Kildare, but, when I have seen Antony—I—I will go away!' . . . 'It has been very sad and bitter for us all,' continued the girl; 'if it could have been different I should have been glad—and I tried so hard—so very hard—but it was all too much for me to bear. . . . Mr Ross, give me some paper that I may write—they MUST set Antony free!'

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To obtain Antony's freedom was by no means so easy a matter as Alma had imagined. When the charge of manslaughter had been withdrawn, he was still retained on a charge of high treason!

For, during the time when Alma lay hovering between life and death, there had been a tumult in the village. First came the news of a murder which had been perpetrated in Dublin, and which was so horrible in its details as to freeze the blood of the most enthusiastic patriot; next came the news that the two men arrested on suspicion had, only two days before the murder, been brought by Antony Ross as guests to Kildare Castle; further inquiries induced the suspicion that Antony, during his last visit to America, had been secretly employed in stirring up rebellion amongst the Irish-American people, and that, moreover, since his return, he had been present at several lawless Ribbon meetings in his own village. All these were only suspicions; still, as they were grave ones, they had to be carefully and duly weighed. At length, as no tangible evidence could be brought against him, he was informed that, though he would be kept under strict police surveillance, he was free.

The news of the young master's freedom, getting somehow into the air, was wafted to Kildare Castle almost before the prisoner himself, dazed by the series of horrible events which had lately come to pass, realised that it was true. The news passing from mouth to mouth gladdened everybody, for Antony, despite his strange moods, was popular with the tenants. Bridget piled the fire with logs until the blaze flared halfway up the chimney, while Mr Ross busied himself to see that all was right for the homecoming of his unfortunate son. Still there was a tinge of sadness over all this joy, for that very morning Antony had written to say that if he returned to Kildare Castle he must be greeted with no rejoicing, as at the return of an honourable man; the life that had been saved through Alma's mercy, rather than his goodness, should be fairly prized at last.

Thus it came to pass that Antony made his homeward journey in strict privacy on a cold dark night, when the earth was thickly covered with a mantle of snow, and clouds gathered darkly above. He dismissed the car which brought him when he was still a mile from home, and turning his face seaward, continued his journey on

foot across the dreary snow-covered waste. He had completed half his journey when the clouds became broken, and snow began to fall; it clung coldly about him, saturating his clothes, while the wind, blowing half a hurricane at sea, smote him fiercely in the face.

It was an inclement night, but he was glad of it, for he knew that in such weather the ways must be deserted and no human creatures abroad to witness his sorry return home. So, with one spark of comfort in his heart, he buttoned his coat around him and resolutely made his way through the storm.

Presently he found himself close to his father's door.

He paused. The sea was roaring heavily, the wind was shrieking, the thin flakes of snow were wildly whirled in the air; even the massive turrets of Kildare Castle seemed to rock beneath the furious clutch of the wind. He walked forward. The dining-room window was uncurtained; he looked in.

The room was empty, save for one form, upon which his eyes remained fixed. A lighted lamp with a green shade stood on a centre table, and a turf fire filled the grate, and lying on a sofa, which was drawn up near to the fire, was Alma. Ah! so changed. She had come to Kildare Castle a young, happy, contented girl; only a few months had passed since then, and yet, as she lay there with the lamplight and firelight upon her, Antony saw that she had been turned into a sorrowful woman. And yet she had had the heart to forgive—to intercede for the man who had struck so cruelly at her own.

He moved away from the window. Then he advanced quietly and opened the hall door. Mr Ross was in the hall; stifling a cry of joy upon his lips, he rushed forward to welcome his son; but Antony, after one warm handshake, quietly put him aside.

'I want to speak to *her*,' he said; and then he entered the room where she sat.

The opening of the door aroused her; she looked round and saw him. For a moment there was silence, then her two hands were impulsively extended, as she cried, sobbing hysterically,—

‘Antony, welcome home!’

He came forward, but he did not say a word. He took her white, wasted hand in his. There, upon her third finger, still glittered the ring which he had sent her, now nearly two years ago—the ring which bound her to him. For a moment his face was irradiated, then the glad light passed altogether from his eyes. Slowly, but deliberately, he drew off the ring and put it in his pocket, then he bent down to kiss her hand.

This was his atonement.

Some time passed, and the silence between them was even more eloquent than words. Then Alma spoke,—

‘Antony,’ she said, ‘will you let me do one thing to-night, that I can think of with gladness till my dying day?’

‘Yes, Alma.’

She rose and left the room; almost before he had time to think she returned, but not alone. She walked up to the hearth where Antony was standing, took his hand, and placed it quietly in that of Conn.

As the two men stood nervously grasping each other’s hands, Alma sank down upon the couch, and they saw that she was crying.

‘Alma,’ they exclaimed simultaneously; but she looked up smiling sadly through her tears,—

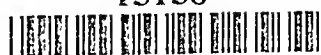
‘Do not mind me,’ she said; ‘I could not help crying, because I feel so glad I came to Kildare.’

X.

A few days of peace and sad contentment, such as had not been known for many a day within the gloomy walls of Kildare Castle; then came a parting—regarded with genuine sorrow on all sides. Antony was about to try his fortunes in America, while Alma had accepted the invitation of some friends to spend the winter in Dublin. This expatriation to America had, in fact, been made the condition of Antony’s release from prison, and he had accepted because he had other, besides political, reasons or wishing to put the sea between himself and Kildare.

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It was arranged, therefore, that he and Bridget should accompany Alma to the end of her destination, while Antony continued alone on his way across the sea.

It was a long dreary winter, and one destined to be made memorable by a series of horrible crimes. A long-suffering and terribly down-trodden people had arisen at last, determined at all hazards to assert their strength, and cast off the yoke which bound them. Ireland was in revolt—a species of civil war seemed about to ensue; it was man against man, brother against brother, and the snow which covered the land was in places stained with blood. Weak-minded people grew terribly afraid, and instead of facing the inevitable, hastened to betake themselves to foreign lands. Amongst these latter were the people whose hospitality Alma had accepted when she thought it her duty to take farewell of Kildare.

‘We will go to London for a few months, my dear,’ said the lady of the house, patting Alma’s hand, ‘and return when this dreadful state of things is over.’

‘Leave Ireland!’ said Alma, with a sinking at the heart; ‘but there is no danger to us. If they strike, it is only at people who have struck so cruelly at them. Surely you are not afraid?’

‘Afraid! well, no—certainly not, dear; but I do not like looking upon unpleasant things when it is just as easy to look at pleasant ones. When I am in London these Irishmen may kill as many of each other as they choose, it won’t matter to me; but by spring I trust they will have got rather tired of the sport, and I shall be able to come comfortably home again.’

Alma did not answer. She went up to her room, sat down to her desk, and hurriedly penned the following note:—

‘MY DEAR MR ROSS,—My friends, alarmed at the state of things here, have decided to go to London. They have asked me to accompany them, but I feel I cannot leave Ireland. May I come back to Kildare? Yours ever affectionately,
ALMA CLIFFORD.’

Two days later, Alma, sitting in the drawing-room at

Stephen's Green, was wondering at having received no reply to her letter, when she was somewhat startled by the sudden appearance of Mr Ross. The old gentleman walked forward in his courtly way, and taking the hands of the astonished girl, said quietly,—

‘This is the answer to your letter, Alma. I have come to take you home.’

So Alma went back to Kildare Castle, and in two months after her arrival there she became the wife of Conn Ross. They spent the early days of their honeymoon among the Kenmare lakes. After it was over, they returned to Kildare Castle, which was henceforth to be their home.

Thus ended Oona's tale. I read it every word, then I laid the precious manuscript aside, and went to sleep.

The next morning, when my toilet was completed, I put the story in my pocket, and leisurely descended the stairs. The breakfast gong had not sounded, so I passed out of the open front door, and was lucky enough to find Oona strolling about among the trees. She looked half-expectant, half-nervous, as if she longed for, yet dreaded, my opinion on her work.

‘Capital!’ I cried at once, smoothing back her golden hair, and kissing her forehead. ‘Where does it all come from, Oona?’

She laughed in a sort of nervous hysterical way, and looked up at me with all the shy delight of a child.

‘You really like it, Jack?’

‘Very much, indeed. And now for my criticism. If you hadn't told me beforehand that it was true, I should have said it was slightly improbable towards the end.’

I thought Oona looked rather crestfallen at this, but she said,—

‘Go on, Jack, tell me all you think. If I am ever going to publish anything, I must get used to criticism.’

‘Well, I will tell you. It struck me as I finished the story, that a man such as you describe Antony Ross to have been, would never have come to forgive his brother?’

‘You don’t think so?’

‘If you say he did, I suppose he must have done. This proves to you that nature is not art. To make this story artistic and give it verisimilitude—that is to say, to make it *read* like the real thing, you must write a new and a fictitious end.’

Oona laughed delightedly.

‘All your theories are upset, Jack,’ she said.

‘Are they?’

‘Why, the end *is* fictitious! Of course it is. The real story was shocking. Antony and Conn fought that day when they met on the road, and when Alma arrived at the spot to warn Conn not to come home, she saw his dead body on the ground, and Antony standing near with a knife in his hand. Old Mr Ross died of a broken heart, and when Antony’s trial came on, Alma was the principal witness against him.’

‘Yes, go on.’

‘Well, she had to speak of course, and the end of it was, that Antony was sentenced to death; but for some reason or other, perhaps on account of the provocation he had received, the jury recommended him to mercy. Afterwards his sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life. He died after being two years in New South Wales.’

‘And Alma?’

‘She gave all her money away to charities, and entered a convent as a working nun. She died some years afterwards. All Conn’s money, the Kildare estate, and the castle passed to a very distant branch of the Ross family, but ever since that time no one has ever lived there, and the castle consequently has been allowed to become a complete ruin. They say it is haunted, that Alma and Conn walk there hand in hand; and several of the *caulighs* aver that they have *seen* the dark figure of Antony sitting on the spot where he murdered his brother.’

‘And why, may I ask, did you refuse to give us the real truth at the end of your story?’

‘Why?’ said Oona, opening her blue eyes their widest.

‘Now, Jack, do you suppose, if I *had* done so, I should ever have got a person to read it?’

A joking reply was on the tip of my tongue, but remembering the manner in which my last attempt of that kind had been received, I very wisely refrained.

‘The public,’ continued Oona gravely, ‘dislike unhappy endings, therefore I have resolved to make *all* my stories end happily. . . . But, Jack, I wanted to ask you one thing. Would you—would you—’

‘Would I—would I? Yes, I daresay I would, darling; but what is it?’

‘Well, I mean, if I were to get ready a few more stories like this, would you send them to London for me and get them published somewhere?’

I reflected. I was not the kind of man to do things for nothing, and therefore I replied,—

‘Yes, on one condition?’

‘Ah, what is that?’

‘Merely that for an hour or two every day you allow me to come to your study for the purposes of *literary consultation*!’

Oona readily consented, adding graciously,—‘I will take up a box of papa’s cigars, so that you may thoroughly enjoy yourself.’

CHAPTER VII.

IN order to see all that there was to be seen in Storport, I one evening accepted Shawn’s invitation to go with the boys to the herring-fishing. We started at sunset, and were out all night; but as soon as the work was over, and the faint glimmering of dawn appeared in the east, we turned our boat’s bow towards the shore, and pulled swiftly homewards. There lay the group of curraghs, still upon the scene of their labour, loaded with phosphorescent fish and dripping nets, and manned with crews of

shivering, weary men. The sea, which during the night had been throbbing convulsively, was calm and bright as a polished mirror, while the grey cliffs were faintly shadowed forth by the lustrous light of the moon.

Wearied with my night's labour, I lay listlessly in the stern of the boat, listening dreamily to the measured splash, splash of the oars, and drinking in the beauty of the scene around me—the placid sea, the black outline of the hills and cliffs, the silently sleeping village of Storport. Presently, however, my ears detected another sound, which came faintly across the water, and mingled softly with the monotonous splashing of the oars and the weary washing of the sea. 'Is it a mermaid singing?' I asked sleepily; 'the village maidens are all dreaming of their lovers at this hour, but the Midian Maras sing of theirs. Oh, yes; it must be a mermaid! For hark! the sound is issuing from the shore yonder, and surely no human being ever possessed a voice half so beautiful.'

To my question no one vouchsafed a reply, so I lay still half dozing, and listened to the plaintive wailing of the voice, which every moment grew stronger. It came across the water like the low sweet sound of an Æolian harp touched by the summer breeze; and, as the boat glided swiftly on, bringing it ever nearer, the whole scene around seemed suddenly to brighten, as if from the touch of a magical hand. Above me sailed the moon, scattering pale vitreous light around her, and touching with her cool white hand the yellow thatched cabins, lying so secluded on the hill-side, the long stretch of shimmering sand, the fringe of foam upon the shingle, the peaks of the hills which stood *silhouetted* against the pale grey sky. A white owl passing across the boat, and almost brushing my cheek with its wing, aroused me at length from my torpor. The sound of the voice had ceased. Above my head a flock of seagulls screamed, and, as they sailed away, I heard the whistle of the curlew; little puffins were floating thick as bees around us, wild rock-doves flew swiftly from the caverns, and beyond again the cormorants blackened the weed-covered rocks. The splash of our oars had for a moment

As the last words fell from her tremulous lips, and the echoes of the sweet voice faded far away across the sea, the boat gliding gently in, ran her bow into the sand, and I, leaping out, came suddenly face to face with the loveliest vision I had ever beheld. 'Is it a mermaid?' I asked myself again, for surely, I thought, no human being could be half so lovely. I saw a pale Madonna-like face, set in a wealth of golden hair, on which the moonlight brightened and darkened like the shadows on a wind-swept sea. Large lustrous eyes, which gazed earnestly sea-ward, then filled with a strange wandering far-off look, as they turned to my face. A young girl, clad in a peasant's dress, with her bare feet washed reverently by the sighing sea; her half-parted lips kissed by the breeze which travelled slowly shoreward; her cheeks and neck were pale as alabaster, so were the little hands, which were still clasped half nervously behind her; and as she stood, with her eyes wandering restlessly, first to my face, then to the dim line of the horizon, the moon, brightening with sudden splendour, wrapt her from head to foot in a mantle of shimmering snow. For a moment she stood gazing with a peculiar far-away look into my face; then, with a sigh, she turned away, and, with her face still turned oceanward, her hands still clasped behind her, wandered slowly along the moonlit sands. As she went, fading like a spirit amid the shadows, I heard again the low sweet sound of the plaintive voice which had come to me across the ocean, but soon it grew fainter and fainter, until only the echoes were heard. I turned to my boatman, who now stood waiting for me to depart.

'Well, Shawn, is it a mermaid?' I asked, smiling. He gravely shook his head.

'No, yer honor; 'tis only a poor colleen wid a broken heart!'

I turned and looked questioningly at him, but he was gazing at the spot whence the figure of the girl had disappeared.

'God Almighty, risht the dead!' he said reverently,

raising his hat, 'but him that brought such luck to Mary O'Connell deserved his curse, God knows!'

This incident, coupled with the strange manner of my man, interested me, and I began to question him as to the story of the girl, whose lovely face was still vividly before me. But for some reason or other, he seemed to shun the subject, so I too held my peace, and we walked on in silence to the Lodge.

It was only about four o'clock in the morning, so, of course, we found the Lodge as quiet as a tomb, and everybody fast asleep. We entered noiselessly by the back way. Shawn remained in the kitchen, I went on to the dining-room. My supper was laid on the table; in the grate were a few smouldering sods of turf, which when knocked together, blazed out into a roaring fire. I lifted the kettle which stood simmering upon the hob, and placed it on the blaze, when it boiled, I mixed two stiff glasses of grog, and called in Shawn to keep me company.

'Now, Shawn,' I said, holding forth a steaming goblet, which made his eyes sparkle like two stars, 'close the door, draw your chair up to the fire, drink off this, and tell me the story of the lovely colleen whom we saw to-night.'

'Would yer honor really like to hear?'

'I would; it will give me something to dream about, and prevent me from thinking too much of her pretty face.'

Shawn smiled gravely.

'Yer honor thinks her pretty? Well, then, ye'll believe me when I tell ye that, if ye was to search the counthry at the present moment, ye couldn't find a colleen to match Mary O'Connell. When she was born, the neighbours thought she must be a fairy child, she was so pretty, and small, and white; and when she got older, there wasn't a boy in Storport but would lay down his life for her. Boys wid fortunes, and boys widout fortunes tried to get her, and, begging yer honor's pardon, I went myself in wid the rest. But it went one way wid us all. Mary just smiled, and said she did not want

to marry. But one day, two years ago now come this Serapht, that lazy shaughraun, Miles Doughty (God rest his soul!) came over from Ballygally, and going straight to Mary, without making up any match at all, asked her to marry him!’

‘Well?’

‘Well, yer honor, this time Mary brightened up, and though she knew well enough that Miles was a dirty blackguard, without a penny in the world—though the old people said no, and there was plenty fortunes in Storport waitin’ on her—she just went against every one of them, and said she must marry Miles. The old people pulled against her at first, but at last Mary, with her smiles and pretty ways, won over Father John, who won over the old people, till at last they said that if Miles would go for a while to the black pits of Pennsylvania, and earn the money to buy a house and a bit of land, he should marry her!’

He paused, and for a time there was silence. Shawn looked thoughtfully into the fire; I lay back in my easy-chair, and carelessly watched the smoke which curled from my cigar, and as I did so I seemed to hear again the wildly plaintive voice of the girl as I had heard it before that night,—

‘I have called my love, but he still sleeps on,
And his lips are as cold as clay;’

and as the words of the song passed through my mind, they seemed to tell me the sequel of the story.

‘Another case of disastrous true love,’ I said, turning to Shawn; and when he looked puzzled, I added,—‘He died, and she is mourning him?’

‘Yes, yer honor, he died; but if that was all he did we would forgive him. What broke the poor colleen’s heart was that he should forget her when he got to the strange land, and marry another colleen at the time he should have married *her*. After that it was but right that he should die!’

‘Did he write and tell her he was married?’

‘Write? Devil the bit, nor to tell he was dead neither! Here was the poor colleen watching and waiting for him for two whole years, and wondering what could keep him; but a few months ago, Owen Magrath, a boy who had gone away from the village long ago on account of Mary refusing to marry him, came back again, and told Mary that Miles was dead, and asked her to marry him. He had made lots of money, and was ready to take a house and a bit of land, and to buy up cattle, if she would but say the word to him.’

‘Well?’

‘Well, yer honor, Mary just shook her head, and said that now Miles was dead ’twas as well for her to die too. At this Owen spoke out, and asked where was the use of grieving so, since for many months before his death Miles had been a married man! Well, when Owen said this Mary never spoke a single word, but her teeth set, and her lips and face went white and cold as clay, and ever since that day she has been so strange in her ways that some think she’s not right at all. On moonlight nights she creeps out of the house and walks by the sea singing them strange old songs, then she looks out as if expecting him to come to her, and, right or wrong, she’ll never look at another man!’

As Shawn finished, the hall clock chimed five, the last spark faded from my cigar, the turf fell low in the grate, so I went to bed to think over the story alone.

During the three days which followed this midnight adventure, Storport was visited by a deluge of rain, but on the fourth morning I looked from my window to find the earth basking in summer sunshine. The sky was a vault of throbbing blue, flecked here and there with waves of summer cloud, the stretches of sand grew golden in the sun-rays, while the hills were glistening bright as if from the smiling sky. The sight revived me, and, as soon as my breakfast was over, I whistled up my dogs and strolled out into the air. How bright and beautiful everything looked after the heavy rain! The ground was spongy to the tread, the dew still lay heavily upon the

heather and long grass ; but the sun seemed to be sucking up golden beams from the bog. Everybody seemed to be out that day, and most people were busy. Old men drove heavily-laden donkeys along the muddy road, young girls carried their creels of turf across the bog, and by the roadside, close to where I stood, the turf-cutters were busy. I paused for a while and watched them at their work, and when I turned to go, I saw for the first time that I had not been alone. Not many yards from me stood a figure watching the turf-cutters too. A young man dressed like a grotesque figure for a pantomime, with high boots, felt hat cocked rakishly over one eye, and a vest composed of all the colours of the rainbow. His big brown fingers were profusely bedecked with brass and steel rings, a massive brass chain swung from his waistcoat, and an equally showy pin adorned the scarf at his throat.

When the turf-cutters, pausing suddenly in their work, gazed at him with wonder in their eyes, he gave a peculiar smile, and asked, with a strong Yankee accent, if they could tell him where one Mary O'Connell lived ; he was a stranger here, and brought her news from the States. In a moment a dozen fingers were outstretched to point him on, and the stranger, again smiling to himself, swaggered away. I stood for a time and watched him go, then I, too, sauntered on. I turned off from the road, crossed the bog, and made direct for the sea-shore.

I had been walking there for some quarter of an hour, when suddenly a shadow was flung across my path, and looking up, I again beheld the stranger. His hat was pushed back now, and I saw for the first time that his face was handsome. His cheeks were bronzed and weather-beaten, but his features were finely formed, and on his head clustered a mass of curling, chesnut hair. He was flushed as if with excitement ! he cast a hurried glance about him, and disappeared.

Five minutes later, as I still stood wondering at the strange behaviour of the man, my ears were greeted with a shriek which pierced to my very heart. Running in the direction whence the sound proceeded, I reached the

top of a neighbouring sandhill, and gazing into the valley below me, I again beheld the stranger. This time his head was bare, his arms were outstretched, and he held upon his breast the half-fainting form of the lovely girl whom I had last beheld in the moonlight. While I stood hesitating as to the utility of descending, I saw the girl gently withdraw herself from his arms, then clasping her hands around his neck, fall sobbing on his breast.

‘Well, Shawn, what’s the news?’ I asked that night, when Shawn rushed excitedly into my room. For a time he could tell me nothing, but by dint of a few well-applied questions I soon extracted from him the whole story. It amounted to this,—that after working for two years like a galley-slave in the black pits of Pennsylvania, with nothing but the thought of Mary to help him on, Miles Doughty found himself with enough money to warrant his coming home; that he was about to return to Storport, when, unfortunately, the day before his intended departure a shaft in the coal-pit fell upon him, and he was left for dead; that for many months he lay ill, but as soon as he was fit to travel he started for home. Arrived in Storport, he was astonished to find that no one recognised him, and he was about to pass himself off as a complete stranger, when the news of his reported death and Mary’s sorrow so shocked him that he determined to make himself known at once.

‘And God help the villain that told her he was married,’ concluded Shawn, ‘for he swears he’ll kill him as soon as Mary—God bless her!—comes out o’ the fever that’s she’s in to-night!’

Shortly after that night I found myself sitting with Oona and Aileen in the hut where Mary O’Connell dwelt. The cabin was illuminated so brightly that it looked like a spot of fire upon the bog, the rooms in the house were crowded, and without, dark figures gathered as thick as bees in swarming time. Miles Doughty, clad rather less gaudily than when I first beheld him, moved amidst the throng with bottle and glass, pausing now and again to look affectionately at Mary, who, decorated with her bridal flowers, was dancing with one of the ‘straw men’

who had come to do honour to her marriage-feast. When the dance was ended, she came over and stood beside me.

‘Mary,’ I whispered, ‘do you remember that night when I heard you singing songs upon the sand?’

Her face flushed brightly, then it grew grave, and finally her eyes filled with tears.

‘My dear,’ I added, ‘I never meant to pain you. I only want you to sing a sequel to those songs to-night.’

She laughed lightly, then she spoke rapidly in Irish, and merrily sang the well-known lines,—

‘Oh, the marriage, the marriage,
With love and mo bouchal for me ;
The ladies that ride in a carriage
Might envy my marriage to me.’

Then she was laughingly carried off to join in another dance.

We joined in the fun till midnight, then, though the merriment was still at its height, we quietly left the cabin, and walked back to the Lodge.

‘Cousin Jack,’ said Biddy, after we had recounted our evening’s adventure to the girls at home, and were about to retire for the night, ‘are you tired of this sort of thing?’

‘Not at all. Why?’

‘Because I should like to take *my* day to-morrow, and show you how real matrimonial matches are made in Connaught. May I?’

I assented, and cordially agreed to place myself on the following day at Bridget’s sole disposal.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘YE’LL just throw in another heifer, and we’ll settle the matter at onst.’

‘Another heifer! Troth, thin, I never will. Don’t ye know already that Norah has the biggest fortune of any

girl in Storport? There's fine cows, four milch cows, and one in calf; and two fat pigs ready for rent day; a strong donkey for drawing turf, and three pounds in gold.'

'And if she has, what is it? Hasn't my boy got a good house and bit o' land, and, forby that, a strong mule and a good cart? There's plenty fortunes in the village that's waitin' for him, believe me, so, if ye don't throw in the heifer, I'll just take myself to another house, and your Norah may wait as she is till next Serapht.'

The foregoing sentences, uttered fiercely by two ragged-looking men, greeted our ears as we stepped into Patrick Macdermot's cabin, and, shaking the rain from our outer garments, made our way swiftly towards the fire.

'After all,' murmured Bridget, as we took our seat upon the form, and held our hands over the flame, 'I am glad we are not too late.'

Though she had spent many a Shrovetide in Ireland, though she had been to dozens of match-makings, and seen hundreds of buxom girls haggled over and finally disposed of as if they had been sheep, she had never before, she said, been so interested. For there was a novelty in this case. Sentiment had been introduced, and was likely to spoil the proceedings. Norah Macdermot had transgressed the rules which had been enforced by her people from generation to generation. Instead of living quietly, as other girls had to do, instead of closing her beautiful eyes to any little fascinations which happened to be possessed by any of the male population of Storport, and giving her ready consent to any match which her parents liked to make for her, she had actually been mad enough to fall in love, and that, too, with a good-looking shaughraun, whose position in life did not entitle him to become the possessor of her hand.

Our entrance caused a momentary cessation of the proceedings, and ere the belligerents began again, I took a glance around the room to discover who might be our companions. There in a corner, crouched beside the fire, was Norah's mother, a little, wizened old woman of sixty; her two stalwart brothers sat on the form by my side; some dozen of the neighbours were sprinkled about

the floor; and yes, I could not be mistaken, a little distance behind them all, half-shrinking back into the gloom, but gazing with fixed anxiety at the speakers, was Norah herself. She looked very pretty that night. Her large dark eyes were moist with tears, her full, petulant lips were quivering, and her little delicate fingers clenched and unclenched themselves in nervous dread. In a moment of impulse I made my way across the kitchen, sat down by the girl's side, and took her hand sympathetically in mine. She turned her face to me, and I felt that her heart was throbbing, her hands burning like fire.

'Who is the boy, Norah?' I whispered, bending towards her.

She shook her head.

'I think they say he comes from Ballygally.'

'What! have you not seen him?'

'No!'

At this point the girl half-rose from her seat and fixed her anxious eyes again upon the central figures in the room. Turning, I perceived that the old woman had left her seat by the fire, and had gone to join in the discussion.

'Will ye take a small sow, Shamus Beg? Toney would make it a sow.'

'I would not, then,' returned her husband decidedly; and Norah sighed, relieved.

Shamus Beg picked up his hat and prepared to take his departure.

'Is that your last word, Toney Macdermot?' he asked; and Toney, sobered a little by this decisive movement, replied slowly,—

'Troth, an it is, thin, unless, indeed, ye'll take a couple of pigs out o' the litter there, and make the matter right.'

Shamus walked over to the corner, and gazed meditatively at the litter of pigs which were reposing upon the straw.

'Will ye say three, Shawn Macdermot?' he asked, after a few moments' thought.

‘No, I will not say three!’

‘You will not? Well, would two and a couple of hens be any loss on ye?’

Toney considered, and as he did so the girl’s face grew white and red by turns, her lips parted with her eager breathing. She half-stretched forth her hand again, for she saw that her mother was about to speak.

‘Ye’ll make it the couple o’ hens and pigs, Toney, and say no more about it. Sure there isn’t as good a house in Ballygally as Shamus Beg’s, and forby that, there’s our Biddy to be fortunèd next Serapht, if Norah is out of the way. Settle it at once, and say no more.’

Thus pressed, Toney relented, the two friends shook hands over their bargain, while the girl, white as any corpse, shrank further into the shade.

Business being over, pleasure began, and as pleasure in Ireland usually takes the form of a plentiful supply of whisky, it flowed in a perfect stream. The bashful swain, who had taken refuge in a neighbouring cabin while the matter was being arranged, was summoned, and came. He entered the cabin, and as he did so, I felt that the girl’s start of astonishment communicated itself to me. Could this be the ‘boy’ to whom they had sold pretty, petulant Norah Macdermot? A man of forty, hideous in face, deformed in figure, an evident bully and tyrant. As the girl was led up to him, she gave a scream, and burst into violent weeping, but the storm did not last. In five minutes she had choked down her sobs and was smiling upon the hideous monster, and the smile did not die even when she was told that in the short space of two days she and Corney Beg would become one.

‘And so, after all,’ I reflected, ‘Norah is disposed of in the usual way. Though she was sentimental enough to give away her heart, her hand has been easily disposed of by her parents; and although they have chosen so badly, she must abide by their will. Life is made up of customs. It would take a strong man’s will to break through old-established rules, such as that by which the girl has been bought and sold.’

It was late ere we rose to go. The kitchen, which

had been gradually filling all the evening, was now crammed to suffocation. The whisky had taken good effect. Some of the company were uproarious in their merriment, while others had completely collapsed. Close beside the fire, with his ugly head resting against a bedpost, his broad, flat nose emitting anything but musical sounds, sat the hero of the evening. But where was his bride-elect? Although I could not help feeling some disgust that she should have yielded so smilingly to these well-laid plans, I should have liked, ere I departed, to have wished her the customary good luck. I glanced keenly at the oddly-mixed crowd, but I could find no trace of her, so I quietly made my way towards the door, and departed with Bridget unseen.

A keen wind blew from the north, the hills were white with sleet, and the blackened sky above portended an early fall of snow. The wind was bitter, as we took a short cut across the fields, and walked swiftly homewards. Ere we had gone many yards, however, we paused suddenly, the soft grass had muffled our footsteps, and we had approached unheard to within a few feet of two figures, those of a man and a woman, who, standing on the other side of the grassy bank which surrounded the field, were talking earnestly in low, subdued tones. I usually despise an eavesdropper, yet I played the part of one. Bridget held me firmly, for we had both recognised the voice of one of the figures. It belonged to Norah Macdermot.

‘Hush, now, Owen dear!’ I heard her whisper, as, aided by the friendly turf, I approached a step or two nearer. ‘Sure, ye don’t think I’d be fool enough to marry the ugly omadhaun, when it’s your own self that’s wantin’ me all the while?’

‘What can ye do at all, now you’ve let them make the match and settle it all so nate?’ returned Owen, sullenly.

‘Well, this is what I’ll do. When I go to bed to-night, I’ll lave my dress on; the kitchen door shall be a bit open, and my windy unfastened. Now, ye’ll just wait about the house till ye see me quench my light,

then ye'll know that they're all safe asleep. So you'll jist get a couple of strong boys to aid ye, and ye'll creep into the house and carry me off. Now, ye know well enough, Owen dear, that if ye can only get me a hundred yards from the house, ye are safe to keep me, because neither Corney Beg nor any dacent boy in Storport would take me after that, if I'd double the fortune !'

'And don't ye call meself a dacent boy, Norah darlin' ?'

'Sure enough, Owen dear ; but then you know what the others don't know, that we planned the runaway atween us, just to get our own way afther all.'

After listening to the foregoing conversation, I stood for a few moments in hesitation. The future of that girl was entirely in my hands. By stepping back to the hut which I had quited, and whispering a word or two in the old people's ears, I could have frustrated all her well-laid plans, and condemned her to spend her days as the wife of Corney Beg. I now understood the reason of the sudden stifling of the sobs which had involuntarily burst from the girl at the sight of her hideous lover. I now understood, too, the meaning of the strange smile which flitted over her face when she was told that ere forty-eight hours had passed she would become that monster's wife. The girl had been acting a part, throwing dust in the eyes of the company, in order to insure the success of her scheme. Should I retrace my steps ? I did not feel at all inclined to do so ; indeed, after another moment of hesitation, I took Bridget's hand upon my arm, walked swiftly towards the Lodge, and left the lovers to conclude their interview alone.

'Och, murther, if it's not a cryin' shame on the whole place !' were the first words which greeted my ears in the morning, as, languidly opening my eyes after a troubled sleep, I saw the maid pulling back the curtains from my window, and admitting the dim light of day.

'Well, Mary, what's the matter ?'

'I'm ashamed to say what's the matter, and that's the

truth !' exclaimed Mary modestly, ' 'tis such a disgrace to Storport !'

Being quite aware that her feminine love of gossiping would not allow her to keep silent on the subject, I judiciously held my peace, and soon heard the whole story. It was merely this, that as soon as the Macdermots were comfortably asleep on the night before, 'that thief o' the world, Owen O'Neil,' as he was called, entered the house, and stole away the girl who had been refused to him, and promised to another ; that, awakened by the cries of the girl, the whole household had been aroused ; and that the villain had been captured ere he got many hundred yards from the house, taken into custody and handed over to the police.

'And there he'll stop, I hope,' concluded the indignant Mary. 'A nice beginning for Serapht, indeed. A fine thing if a boy can take away a dacent girl's character, and get nought done to him after all !'

The narrative excited me. I dressed hastily, and as hastily stepped down to Toney Macdermot's hut. Here all was confusion ; and, ere I put my head in at the door, I perceived that Norah's prophecy of the previous night was surely coming true. The bashful swain had just been with his father to break off the match ; the girl's mother and father were in tears ; her two brothers scowled at her like infuriated bears ; but her face seemed to me to be brighter than I had seen it for many a day.

For some time the old people were inconsolable ; at last their grief subsided. Being well aware that, after the escapade of the night before, no boy in the place would make a match with poor Norah, they were only too glad to hush the matter up, and hand over her and her fortune to Owen O'Neil. So Owen was released from the barrack, and, at Norah's request, invited to spend the evening, at her father's house. Whether or not Norah's treachery was ever discovered, I never learned. I only know that, in two days after that memorable night, she was married to Owen, and that during her married life she has never once missed giving 'a dance' on the first night of Shrovetide.

CHAPTER IX.

‘My day promises to be fine,’ said Nora, the next morning, as flushed and panting from an early walk, she met me on the threshold of the Lodge. ‘I had my breakfast an hour ago, and went down to the ferry to see that everything was right. There’s no wind for sailing—which is rather a pity, isn’t it? for the *Ariel* goes like a bird; but I have made Shawn put in the sail, in case the breeze gets up later in the day.’

‘And what about the rowing, Nora?’ asked my uncle; ‘have you sent for Conolly?’

‘He isn’t at home, papa,’ returned Nora; ‘so I’ve got Mickie and Patsey “the ferry,” and I thought you would like to take Shawn.’

‘Yes, we’ll take Shawn. Then is everything down, Nora?’

‘Everything, I think, papa. There’s your guns, your brown waterproof bag, full of cartridges, and the fishing lines.’

‘And the dogs,’ I added.

‘Oh, we mustn’t take them!’ said Nora. ‘You won’t get any shooting till you get to Cruna, and then you can borrow Mr Dunroon’s dogs. When he comes over here; he uses papa’s dogs always, and he’d be dreadfully offended if we wouldn’t return the compliment.’

As we had nothing to see to, we agreed to start at once, and in five minutes more we were on our way to the sea.

Only three of the girls, Kate, Nora, and Oona, were coming with us. Aileen and Biddy had generously volunteered to keep house in Kate’s absence. Ever since that unfortunate overturning of the boat, Amy could never be persuaded to go on the water.

We found the boat waiting for us at the ferry, and though sorely pressed by the ferryman to enter the shebeen and have ‘just one glass,’ we resisted—embarked, pushed off, and rowed out to sea. Two of

Shawn's big brothers and the old ferryman were on the shore, while in the fields just above, quite a little crowd of boys and girls had collected to watch us row away.

The day was indeed gloriously fine. A shower of sunshine had come to melt away the early frost ; but though the sky was blue and the sun-rays were warm, the air had in it a touch of winter chilliness still. We took a few strokes straight out to sea, then turned the boat's bow and continued our course, keeping within a couple of oar's-length from the sand. As we went, I looked back at the village, and saw it lying basking in a golden blaze of sunlight. Far away, the cliffs were wrapt in a hazy mist, the jagged crags and rounded summits clearly discernible against a bluish-grey sky. The wild waters of the Atlantic were hushed in oily calm, and mirrored in the glassy surface were the surrounding hills. Not a ripple was on the bar as we glided gently over it, and not a sound was heard save the splash, splash of the oars, as we silently sat and enjoyed the beauty of the scene.

Once over the bar, the men rested on their oars, and looked to my uncle for instructions. He passed the look on to Nora, who was spokeswoman for the day.

'I think,' said she, 'we had better begin with a row round the cliffs ; it's on our way. They are well worth seeing ; and you might get a few pigeons. Afterwards we can strike out to sea and make straight for Cruna.'

The proposition being agreed to, the boat's bow was turned towards the cliffs, and sped on before the powerful strokes of our three sturdy boatmen. I had offered no opposition to the plan ; indeed, at that moment I felt too lazily happy to oppose anything. I was stretched, half reclining, half sitting, among the rugs in the stern, close to Oona. When I was not looking at the scenery I was covertly watching her ; and in my own mind I judged the latter prospect the fairer of the two.

She certainly looked very charming that day, clad in an elegantly-cut costume of serge, of the palest blue, with her golden hair half hidden beneath the soft brim of a blue hat. She had on her lap a volume of old legends, which I had recommended her to read, and her gentle,

dreamy eyes roamed hither and thither, as if in search of materials for her stories which she worked at so persistently at home.

Suddenly the sound of my name aroused me from my reverie. I looked at Nora, who had addressed me, and, in obedience to her instructions, I put a couple of cartridges into my gun, passed the oarsmen, and placed myself in the boat's bow. I saw now that we were approaching the cliffs, a dark, grey mass, which rose above us to an enormous height, completely cutting off all the rays of the sun, and plunging us in cold shadow. It was like passing from summer to winter, from day to night.

For a time we paddled about at their base, entering narrows, black creeks and corners, and dark secluded bays. Now and then the rowers rested upon their oars to give a splash and a shout. I crouched in the bow, expectant, gun in hand, but beyond a few sand larks which had been wading in the shallows, and a frightened cormorant which flew out to sea, we could find nothing. The men phlegmatically returned to their work, and we again sped onwards.

Then we entered a narrow passage, cut between two enormous cliffs, one of which pointed needle-like to the sky. The water below appeared to be as black as ebony; the cliffs almost black, and perfectly barren.

The boat paused.

'Look out, yer honor,' cried Shawn; and he placed his hands over his mouth, and whistled shrilly and loud.

'Look out, Jack, there they are; blaze away, my boy,' cried my uncle; and I did blaze away with both my barrels, and looked about for the result. Alas! there was none. Half-a-dozen rock-pigeons, looking small as starlings, high in the air passed swiftly over the top of the cliff and disappeared. I was so chagrined by my ill-luck that I forgot to reload; luckily my uncle was on the *qui vive*, so the next brace that came out, fell like stones to his two barrels.

'Are ye ready, yer honor?' said Shawn, looking at me rather gloomily; and upon my answering in the affirmative, he put his hands over his mouth, and whistled again,

while his brothers rattled and splashed with the oars. Three more birds flew swiftly out, and again my barrels were discharged, but nothing fell; then a straggler whizzed like a bullet over our heads, and fell to my uncle's gun.

I looked round, and asked him how he managed it.

'Tis because I'm accustomed to the motion of the boat, and you're not,' he returned quietly. 'Shawn, are they all out, do you think?—if so, we'll go on to the next cave, and give Mr Stedman another chance.

They evidently were all gone, for, though Shawn whistled and his brothers shouted and splashed, no more birds appeared. We picked up those already dead, and went on. Soon we came to another cavern, even larger than the last.

'Jack,' cried my uncle, 'put some cartridges in your pocket, for we're going to land you; you'll shoot steadier from the rock.'

He spoke rapidly to the men in Irish, and the boat was rowed up to a huge mass of rock, which, it being low tide, was uncovered, and which lay just outside the mouth of the cave. The water was turbulent here, and the boat rose and fell tumultuously; but I watched my chance, and succeeded in leaping safely out. Once I was landed, the boat pushed rapidly off, and disappeared into the cavern.

I set my teeth in grim determination, my late ignominious failures having made me doggedly determined to succeed, and I soon proved that my uncle was right; with the steady rock beneath my feet, I shot well; three pigeons fell to my gun, and when the boat returned to take me on board, after having picked up my spoil, Shawn's face was transformed.

'After all, a bad beginning is better than a bad ending,' said Oona. 'Look, Nora, when we get out a bit, we shall find breeze enough to sail to Cruna.'

And she was right; as soon as we were well away from the shelter of the cliffs, we hoisted the sail, and the *Ariel*, guided by my uncle's steady hand, breasted the waves like a bird.

Three hours' sailing brought us well within shelter of Cruna.

It was a solitary island, rising up to an enormous height above the level of the sea. As we approached, a sharp, jagged crag bent above us, but detecting malice in the attitude, we hurried on, and fortunately escaped an enormous boulder, which was suddenly detached, and rolled with a tremendous crash into the sea.

Next we entered a passage which, as we proceeded, broadened out into a good-sized channel, and we found ourselves in what would have been an enormous cavern, if it had had another roof than the clear blue sky. Here the surge was so great that our boat was in a fair way of being upset, when one of the men, intending to make her secure, jumped airily out on to the rocks, missed his footing, and gently disappeared beneath the surface of the water! I began seriously to think that our expedition would have a tragic ending, for the surge was so great, the passage so narrow, that our means of assisting him seemed small indeed, but the men, more accustomed to such mishaps, were of a different opinion. Two of them coolly secured the end of a rope, and lightly leapt out on to the rocks, leaving the third in the boat, who, when the unfortunate victim appeared on the surface, slipped a noose under his arm-pits. He was gently hauled out on the rocks, very little the worse for his bath.

After this exciting little incident, we landed and examined the rocks. They rose up to such a height that the brain turned dizzy when we tried to decipher the tiny specks of birds which were floating above like gnats in the sun-ray. As they descended, the shrill whistle of the curlew reached our ears! we crouched in a corner, but the wary birds were not to be deceived, their quick eyes soon saw the danger, and with a taunting cry of 'curlew,' they disappeared round a corner of the crag.

Slowly, very slowly, we made our way along the slippery rocks—now going down on our knees, and passing some dangerous bit on all-fours; now seizing a small projecting piece of stone, and holding on for very life, while our feet searched for a cranny among the slippery

seaweed below. Thus we passed along, avoiding any mishap, until we came to an opening in the rock, and entered a low narrow passage, apparently leading into the interior of the island. Here the air was damp and chilly, our voices had a hollow, unearthly sound, and it was so dark that we had to grope our way. As we proceeded, the passage broadened, and faint streaks of light appeared; next we heard the deep-drawn breathing of the waters, then we were gladdened with a burst of broad sunlight, and we found ourselves approaching an enormous cavern.

The channel here was considerably broader than the last, and the cave was open at either end. About midway in the channel was a good-sized weedy reef, which was covered with great black seals. Our approach caused a general panic; they all rushed down to the water, and swam about like dogs. We gazed around and examined every creek and corner within our reach but we could discover nothing,—all was quiet and peaceful as a tomb; our voices echoed through the vault, and our footsteps gave forth a hollow, unearthly sound. Not a living thing was visible until we fired a shot, and then, as if by magic, the whole air was filled with birds; suddenly they all disappeared, leaving the place as quiet and peaceful as before.

Having seen all there was to be seen, we retraced our steps through the dark passage, mounted a flight of stairs which had been roughly hewn out of the solid rock; and after half-an-hour, which seemed an eternity, re-emerged into the sunlight, and found ourselves standing upon the fruitful fields of Cruna. It was a good-sized island, about ten miles across, inhabited by several hundred people, and governed completely by the master. Some of the peasants who dwelt thereon had never even seen the mainland, but were content to toil all day on the land, to dwell in the cabins which were dotted like beaver-huts about the hills, and to rest at last in the graveyard by the sea. There was no resident priest, but Father John occasionally sent over his curate to preach the Word and administer consolation to the sick. There was no re-

sident doctor, but occasionally a travelling medicine-man came, *en passant*, to the island, and rested for a month or so among the sick. All this information I got from Nora, who proceeded to inform me that, during the time of old Mr Dunroon, things upon Cruna Island had been in a very bad way indeed ; that Mr Dunroon himself—an ignorant, superstitious man—had encouraged belief in witchcraft, the evil eye, etc., until the people had actually burnt down the house of an old woman, whom they believed to be a witch, and had finally driven her forth to perish in the sea.

‘But things are much better under the new master,’ added Nora. ‘He is stern in his endeavour to put down superstition of any kind ; he has built a capital school, and I believe he will soon have a resident priest. Look, there is the master’s house ; I think we had better go straight there, hadn’t we, Kate ?’

Kate assented, so we set off—I carrying Oona’s cloak and book, and keeping as close as possible to Oona’s side.

The building which we approached was a plain-looking structure, built of stone, and whitewashed. It was surrounded by a fine garden, however, and backed by capacious stables, dog-kennels, etc.

From any sign of life there was about, the house might have been deserted ; but Kathleen’s knock brought to the door a very neat little maid, who showed us at once into the drawing-room. The little maid was evidently no stranger to the girls, for they all said something to her in Irish, which made her blush and smile : and then my uncle added those kind words of his, which were always ready, and which made him so popular in Connaught.

We entered the drawing-room, and were all looking about for comfortable seats, when the door opened, and the mistress of the house appeared. She was a tall, graceful woman, with a face which, in its youth, could not have been unlike Oona’s. Though she had passed her fortieth year, she still retained a good deal of her youthful beauty. Her hair was golden, her eyes were blue—

like, yet unlike, Oona's ; for at times there came into them a look which seemed to transform them, and which I could not understand. I glanced from her to Oona—from Oona back again to her ; the two faces were similar, but at last I understood the difference,—the one had faced pleasure, the other only pain. Yes, I had before me just such a picture as my darling little Oona would present after the experience of heartrending sorrow.

Mrs Dunroon was delighted to see us, and she said so in the most winning voice that had ever fallen upon my ear,—‘Though she feared,’ she said, ‘it was but a dull house for the girls to come to. All her children had returned to their schools in Dublin ; only a fortnight before they had made the house lively while they were at home, but since their departure, she and George had fallen into their old routine.’

Then she was introduced to me, and I began to make some apology for intruding uninvited ; but she silenced me at once.

‘It is you who confer the favour,’ she said, smiling, and letting her fine eyes rest for a moment upon my face. ‘If you will only shoot over the land and fish the rivers, we shall be delighted, for my husband’s guns are growing rusty for want of use, and the dogs are getting so fat they soon won’t be able to walk.’

Then she asked us to excuse her ; she was certain we must be famishing ; the moment she heard of our arrival she had ordered lunch to be served, but she thought our chance of getting it quickly would be doubled if she went to the kitchen and helped the maids.

The moment she was gone, Nora asked me what I thought of her ?

‘She is about the most charming woman I ever met. In her youth she must have been the image of Oona.’

To my amazement my uncle went over to Oona, who was sitting on the music stool, put his arms round her, and lifted her sweet face to his.

‘Like my Oona ?’ he said, and his voice actually trembled. ‘Ah ! the good God forbid that my little girl should ever have to face such scenes.’

I suspected before that there must have been some strange episode in our hostess's past ; now I was sure of it. I was about to ask some questions about it, when Nora addressed me again.

'I am glad you like her,' she said, 'for we all adore her ; and as for papa, he thinks there is no such woman in the world. She is very beautiful, is she not? and she is as good as she is beautiful.'

'Does she live here all the year round?'

'Almost. She and her husband come occasionally to Ballyshanrany, and every winter, I believe, they go to Dublin for a while, but that is all. You see Mrs Dunroon loves Cruna, though indeed she has little cause ; and most of her time is spent in trying to stamp out superstition, and improve the people.'

Here our conversation was interrupted by the re-appearance of our hostess. 'Luncheon will be ready in five minutes,' she said, and she had us all shown to our rooms.

It was a capital lunch, capitally served, and we did full justice to it. After it was over, we began to discuss our arrangements. 'It was growing late,' my uncle said, and if we wanted to reach Storport at a decent hour, we must soon think of returning. But Mrs Dunroon was horrified. Return to Storport that night, she said ; it was not to be thought of. We must stay a few days, and have some sport ; besides, we couldn't think of leaving without having seen her husband, who had ridden over to a distant part of the island to transact some important business, and would not return till six. After a very feeble resistance, we yielded, in reality by no means displeased. I, in truth, was very glad to remain, for I was already very much interested in Cruna Island. I felt I should like to see more of it, and to know more of its people.

Lunch fairly over, our hostess set herself the task of providing us all with amusement for the afternoon. Kathleen preferred to remain in the house, my uncle and Nora were provided with a couple of fishing rods, while I accepted my hostess's invitation to mount one of her

husband's horses, and take a ride round the island. Then Mrs Dunroon turned to Oona,—

‘Would you like a ride, too, dear?’ she said; ‘if so, I think I can make my habit fit you.’

And Oona assented.

We set off together, and had a long ride, but I am afraid I saw very little of the island. The ride, however, seemed to have done us good, for we were both in excellent spirits when we got back again. During dinner we were beset with questions about what we had seen. My uncle had been trying some of Aileen's flies, and was in great spirits at having killed a couple of salmon. Both Oona and I had to confess, rather shamefacedly, that we had neither been far nor seen much.

‘I am afraid,’ I said, speaking to my hostess, but glancing occasionally at the radiant face of my cousin, ‘that Oona would never make her living as a guide. Now, on a place like Cruna Island, there must be oceans of spots where the fairies dance and the witches hide. Oona has positively not pointed out one.’

I glanced at my hostess, and stared in wonder at the look of mingled pain and terror which crossed her face. She tried to conquer it. I saw she fought bravely, but I saw she could not answer, and her eyes filled with tears. Then, suddenly, I remembered the allusions which had been made to some great sorrow in the lady's past life, and I felt that my few light words had touched the chord.

There was a moment of intense silence, till Kathleen, always ready in time of need, began to tell about Shawn's doings that day, and the conversation soon became general. But I could not forget the incident, it haunted me all the evening, and was still unpleasantly vivid in my mind when I rose to go to bed. Having reached my room, I found Nora seated in an easy-chair, looking very important, and very mysterious indeed.

CHAPTER X.

‘COUSIN JACK,’ she said, when in obedience to her command I had carefully closed the door, ‘you are fond of reading in bed, aren’t you?’

‘Very.’

‘I’ve got a story for you to-night, which I want you to read—will you?’

‘Of course I will.’

‘Read it all to-night—every word of it—for to-morrow I mean to show you where the scene of the story is laid, and introduce you to two of the characters. You would like that?’

I replied in the affirmative; at the same time I expressed my amazement that the story, if a true one, should have found its way into print, for by this time Nora had produced a modest-looking volume, which I perceived at once to be a collection of tales, had opened it, and pointed out the first as the one which she recommended, to my special care. Thereupon Nora proceeded to explain.

‘It is about two years ago this autumn,’ she said, ‘since a very benevolent-looking old gentleman, with a long white beard, grey hair, and spectacles, came down to look at Mr O’Neil’s shooting-lodge, that white tumble-down looking house on the face of the hill, you know, which he lets whenever he can, with some of the land thereabouts. He wasn’t much taken with the house, but he called at the Lodge to ask papa about the shooting, and we invited him to stay to lunch. Well, it turned out a very wet afternoon, so, as he seemed in no great hurry to go, Kate offered him a bed, and said he had better dismiss the car which had brought him, and take ours as far as Glenderig, on the following day. Well, it ended in his staying with us for a fortnight. While he was there, I told him this story. About six months after he was gone I received one morning this little volume, and on opening it was amazed to find my name on the fly-leaf. Look, here it is.’

She turned to the fly-leaf of the book, and I beheld, written in a neat little hand,—

‘To Miss Nora Kenmare—part author of story number one—in memory of my first visit to Connaught.’

Nora had certainly succeeded in interesting me. When I found myself alone, I did not attempt to go to bed, but having settled myself, I opened the volume and began to read

‘THE MAID OF CRUNA ISLAND.’

The very title caught me. I turned up my lamp, and settled myself down comfortably to read the tale.

DEEP darkness hung like a cloud above Cruna Island; the sky was dark, unrelieved by star or moon; and on every hand stretched the sea—jet black and glassily calm—but on the shingly beach of the island the waves broke into snow-white surf, on which a ray of light played faintly, now gleaming in sparkles upon the thin line of foam, now shining like a steady star on the jet-black waters beyond.

The light issued from the window of a hut which stood upon the beach, in the shadow of an overhanging crag; the oval roof of this strangely-situated dwelling was formed of the upturned hull of an old fishing-smack, while the walls were built of loose pieces of rock, and stones which had evidently been collected from the shore. Altogether the place was one in which some worn-out old sea-rover might have wished to spend his declining years. About it, in time of storm, the salt sea spray was wafted; around it the sea-weed clung; on the rocks beside it the cormorants swarmed and the sea-gulls screamed; everywhere about the weed-covered crags, the sea-piets flew; while far away to sea the gannet shot like a stone upon his prey. The light issuing from the hut, and flashed upon the edge of the sea, revealed also to the eye a small rudely-built coble, which was drawn up on the beach, and securely fastened to a huge boulder lying beside the hut; close to this a thick rope was coiled upon the ground. The room, which the half-open door revealed, was of

moderate dimensions, and in every way harmonised with the external appearance of the hut. The floor was paved with small round stones, which were carefully placed and brightly polished; dried fish, coils of rope, and fishing-lines hung from rafters which were black as ebony. In one corner stood a pair of rudely-made oars, and in another, neatly folded, was a red canvas lug-sail. At the upper end of the floor a small square space was left unpaved, and on this slowly smouldered away two or three clods of peat. The occupants of the room were an old woman and a young girl. The girl sat in the window recess, with her head bent down over an old, stained Irish Bible, which lay open on her knees, and from which she was reading. The old woman had placed herself on a small stool, close beside the smouldering fire. Her face was of that ashen-grey hue which is generally found only on the faces of the dead. Her hair, which was white as snow, was carefully smoothed over her forehead. Her eyes were sunken and around them was a jet-black ring, which gave to her face a sinister look. Her brows were contracted into a habitual frown; nose long and pinched; lips thin and slightly compressed. Her figure was angular and bony. She wore a plain black cap, carefully tied beneath her chin, and a black gown, which was raised up in the front, and pinned around her waist, falling at the back like a long peaky tail. Although she was seventy years of age, her back was straight as an arrow, as she sat upon her stool, with her bony hands crossed upon her knee, and her pale, lack-lustre eyes gazing sternly upon a tombstone which rested against the opposite wall, and on which was marked two words—her own name—

AILEEN O'CONNOR.

The expression of the face was one of terrible resolve and quiet determination. The thin compressed lips, long hooked nose, and knitted brow, were formidable characteristics, especially when coupled, as in this case, with a most repelling and disdainful manner.

Small blame, therefore, could be attached to the inhabitants of Cruna Island, when they attributed to Aileen O'Connor all the power and subtleties of witchcraft; when they believed that her very glance could deal death, or worse, to man or beast; and that she was in the possession of numerous diabolic arts, by which she had the power of dealing misfortune or prosperity to any of her numerous neighbours.

Scarce a person on the island would have dared gain-say her in word or deed, and it was averred by the peasantry that the master himself would as soon have ordered his coffin as have issued the command that Aileen O'Connor was forthwith to quit his territory.

Fourteen years before, when the inhabitants of Cruna Island had one morning found her, with a little child, inhabiting the deserted, half-ruined cabin on the beach, they had looked at each other in some suspicion and intense surprise. Where had the strangers come from, and by what means had they contrived to reach the shore?

Cruna Island was by no means accessible, and on the morning of the strangers' arrival there were no strange smacks to be seen in the bay. The whole proceeding savoured so strongly of magic that the cloudy brains of the islanders were fairly puzzled. Quickly they pressed around the extraordinary apparitions, and as quickly were they repelled, for Aileen O'Connor met their advances with a cold and haughty repulse. She answered no questions, volunteered no explanations, and finally the baffled inquisitors perforce retired from the contest, as much enlightened on the subject as they had been on the first day of the strangers' arrival.

Such proceedings as these were not suffered to pass unnoted even on the lonely shores of Cruna Island. No sooner did the master become acquainted with the facts of the case than he hurried to the scene of action, fully prepared to excommunicate the pair who had dared to settle thus unceremoniously upon his dominions. On reaching the beach he had found his people congregated together about the hut. Quickly passing through their

midst, he had entered the cabin, closing the door behind him. There he had remained for a time, while without gathered a little crowd, who fully expected that before half-an-hour had elapsed the strangers would be sailing away for other shores. Great was their amazement, however, when at length the master issued from the cabin, and informed them, in a trembling voice, that the strangers were Crunans.

None knew what had wrought this change in the mind of the man, none thought of connecting him in the remotest way with the ghastly-looking woman; still less could they have conceived the whole facts of the case.

On entering the cabin, the master of Cruna stood face to face with Aileen O'Connor, a girl whom, in his youth, he had wronged and deceived, and who, smarting under the sting of neglect, and after heartbroken appeals to the man whom she had loved, had emigrated from her home, vowing upon him some terrible revenge. Never since then had her lover beheld her, scarcely had the thought of her crossed his mind; but when the girl, transformed into an elderly woman, had so suddenly and unexpectedly appeared before him, his soul was shaken, and he lacked the heart to drive her forth again.

The mystery surrounding the phantom woman deepened year by year; her retired mode of living giving rise to numerous conjectures, which in time ripened into certainties. Scarcely a soul had ever been known to cross her threshold, yet her manner of living soon became known, and when the islanders were assured of the fact that she spent her time sitting beside the fire, calmly gazing upon the stone which was to mark her own last resting-place, they cast upon each other most gloomy, significant looks. In their perplexity, they turned to the child for information, yet here their curiosity met with small gratification.

On her arrival at the island, Nina O'Connor had scarcely attained her sixth year, and the fund of information with which she attempted to gratify the eager inquiries of the islanders was of the most unsatisfactory kind.

She only knew that she had no friends but her Aunt Aileen, as she called her, who for some mystic reason had migrated from the south to end her days on the lonely Irish coast. Nina was a pretty child, with soft brown eyes and hair. About her there was some charm, some invisible attraction, which would have gone far to soften the natures of much more obdurate-hearted people than those at Cruna Island. About these she cast a glamour which quickly secured for her the good graces of the whole community, and, in a measure, those of the master himself.

This latter phenomenon might be easily accounted for; the landlord, although hard and pitiless, had been somewhat softened since the death of his wife and only child, who were lost at sea some six years before the arrival of the strangers on the island. The catastrophe had wrought in him a wondrous change, since, in a measure, he blamed himself as the main cause of the calamity. In point of fact, the blame, if blame there was, could be attached to no one in particular, unless, indeed, to the victim herself, who had sacrificed her own life, as well as that of their child, mainly through allegiance to her husband.

Ever careful over his wife's safety, he had sent her to Dublin to pass over an event which might, he feared, have serious results if it happened in the lonely wilds of Cruna. In Dublin his first child had been born to him, but scarcely had his wife recovered her strength when she got news that her husband was seriously ill. Struggling thus between wifely and maternal love, she had ultimately sailed from the city in mid-winter to attend the sick-bed of her husband. That husband she had never again beheld. The vessel which was bringing her home, being overtaken by a terrible storm, had foundered within sight of the island, and every soul on board had perished. From this blow the man had never thoroughly recovered, and the loss of his child especially had gone far towards softening his heart to children generally.

When little Nina O'Connor first began to run about the island, it happened, in the natural course of things,

that the master was constantly encountering her. At first his manner towards her was the same as that towards any other children of the village; but gradually her pretty face and winsome ways drew his attention towards her, and on observing her more closely he began to notice that she was just the age that his own child would have been, had she been spared him. Henceforth his interest in her increased. Whenever he met her he invariably paused to speak to her, or pat her soft cheek; occasionally he presented to her some pence or rude toy; and once, when he saw her near his house, he actually took her in, and allowed her to pass an hour or so in the gloomy dwelling, entertained by his little nephew and heir-apparent, George Dunroon, while he himself watched the two in grim pleasure.

The young master, who was some years older than Nina, was a kindly lad, though rather wild and irreclaimable in his conduct. He had spent some years of his life on Cruna Island; for, on the death of his aunt, he had at once been sent by his mother, doubtless with a sly eye to the future, to afford consolation to the old man. In truth, the free, unrestrained atmosphere of Cruna suited the lad far better than the murky air of the southern city where he had been born. Having a fancy for daring adventure, he was constantly out exploring the island, or scouring the crags, over which he hung at times suspended, eagerly searching for the nests of the eagle or rock-raven. Nina soon became a partner in his wanderings, under his auspices becoming acquainted with every corner of the island, or at times accompanying him to his uncle's house, where the children were like gleams of sunshine brightening up the gloomy place. No sooner did the state of affairs reach the ears of Aileen O'Connor than she sternly forbade the child ever again to approach the master's house or to seek the company of his nephew; and more than once, when George came to the hut to seek for Nina, the old woman harshly drove him from the door. After this the children had never again met openly; but, unable to perceive the justice of such unwonted tyranny, they continued to

meet in secret, until the boy was sent back to his friends in the south, and Nina was left alone.

As years passed on, and Nina grew to womanhood, she saw that a cloud was gradually darkening her horizon. The islanders grew less kindly in their manner towards her; soon they began to shun her altogether; and once or twice she even noticed the master shrink from her very glance. These signs of hostility were only preparatory to the assertion, which gradually became whispered about, that the girl was affected with the 'evil eye,' a curse which she had doubtless inherited from her diabolic relative. Soon, indeed, it was most emphatically averred that one glance from her eye had actually struck the widow Monnaghan's black cow as dead as a stone, and that little Shamus Beg, the fiddler's son, had never been able to leave his chair since Nina's looks had last rested upon his face. Finding it utterly hopeless to correct the reports which were thus circulated concerning her, Nina was fain at length to shrug her shoulders and bow her head, in silent concession. Being thus debarred from all social intercourse with her neighbours, utterly companionless, save for the gloomy society of her aunt, the girl thenceforth led the life of a recluse. She felt that her presence created disgust, malignant suspicion, and sometimes hatred; and she knew that, were it not for the evil attributes with which she and her aunt were supposed to be endowed, some consummate evil would surely be meditated against them.

In this moral atmosphere she dwelt. Her days were spent in lonely wanderings on the island; her evenings in reading aloud to her aunt from the old, stained Irish Bible, or sitting beside the cabin door listening to the surging sea. At the opening of our story Nina had scarcely attained her twentieth year. Rather small of stature, possessed of a lithe, graceful figure, soft round cheeks, brown eyes, and a mass of long, nut-brown hair, she was a strong contrast to her gaunt, ghastly-looking relative.

The light of a lamp flashed down upon her, brilliantly

illuminating her face and figure. She wore an ordinary peasant's dress; her hair was twisted and neatly coiled round her head; the light in her eyes was keen and penetrating, and a thoughtful, preoccupied expression was on her face. As she read, her voice rang through the room, not in its usual quiet measured cadences, but in fluctuating uncertainty; and now and again an access of tremor was perceptible. She seemed restless and uneasy. Her foot was tapping on the floor, her fingers pulling at the edges of her book; and at times peeping cautiously through the window, she vainly endeavoured to penetrate into the gloom.

The old woman sat motionless as a statue, listening in grim satisfaction to the words which fell upon her ear, while her eyes still rested upon the tombstone. The air was oppressively still, not a sound was to be heard but the weary washing of the sea. A loud and prolonged shout of many voices from a distance soon caused Nina to start violently and leap to her feet, casting the book roughly upon the floor.

'What is the matter, Nina?' asked Aileen O'Connor, half-turning towards the girl.

'Sure, 'tis the young master, I think, Aunt Aileen, that has just arrived.'

Running to the door, Nina gazed anxiously forth. On the cliffs, some distance from the cabin, a crowd of people was dimly perceptible, and lights moved, while from the sea a ray of light, evidently proceeding from the mast of a ship, shone brightly as a star. At sight of this, Nina's heart gave a great leap, and her lip quivered. Leaning against the door-post, she gazed on. Beside the fire the old woman sat, gaunt as a shadow. As the shout struck upon *her* ear, the expression of her face grew sterner and more determined still, while her bloodless lips muttered slowly,—

'The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation. With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.'

CHAPTER XI.

THE master of Cruna Island was a prosperous man in the true sense of the word. The house which he occupied—a small edifice of stone, far superior in appearance to any of those surrounding it—was placed on a height in the middle of the island, and while standing at the windows of any one of the rooms, he could gaze upon well-fed flocks and herds, and several miles of well-tilled land, and truthfully repeat the rhyme—

‘I am monarch of all I survey,
My right there is none to dispute ;
From the centre all round to the sea,
I am lord of the fowl and the brute.’

Unlike the barren bogs and mountains which characterise the scenery of Connemara, the land of Cruna Island was tolerably fruitful, it having been carefully cultivated by its successive proprietors. Each year its nominal value had increased, and when it became the property of the present owner, it might be said to represent a very tolerable income. Every available acre of land had been manipulated for cultivation. Stretches of bright, green pasture and fields of yellow corn were everywhere revealed to the eye, and above, far up, near the clouds, where the furrows of the ploughshare had not penetrated, were barren heights and craggy mountain-peaks, where the fox and the mountain goat dwelt unmolested, where the grouse bred, and the blue hares abounded. Here and there on the hillsides, or lying half-hidden in a waving sea of ripe corn, were little fishing-hamlets, the picturesque dwellings of the population, a quaint people, in whose minds still reigned paramount many of those wild legendary superstitions which had been believed in by their ancestors. No breeze from the south ever penetrated to those hills ; seldom was a stranger known to tread those lonely shores. Century after century had passed away, races of men

sprung up and died, the outer world progressed and changed, but still the inhabitants of Cruna Island remained as little enlightened in their ideas as had been their progenitors before them. In this respect, it must be avowed, the master himself seemed little in advance of his people. He was a man who possessed little more education than his tenants, who was, to some extent, guided by their feeble lights, and whose head was equally as full of invincible superstitions.

One morning, some two days after the young master's arrival at Cruna, the lad lay full length on a plot of grass before his uncle's door, his head resting upon his crossed hands as he gazed silently up at the cloudless sky. Beside him, a greyhound was stretched basking in the sunshine as lazily as his master, while a few paces off sat the old man himself on a rude wooden bench which was erected beside his door. He sat silent; his broad, brown hands resting on the top of a stick which stood between his knees, and his dull eyes fixed upon his nephew's indolent face. At length he spoke.

'How long do you intend to stay, George?' he asked, and without raising his head or changing his position the young man replied,—

'Till autumn only, then I must go to Dublin for a month.'

'And will you not grow tired before then?'

'Tired? not I. Cruna gives one a foretaste of Paradise in weather like this.' Then rising to his feet he asked suddenly,—

'By the way, uncle, what has become of Nina O'Connor, my little playmate; is she still here?'

Immediately the old man's manner changed. Glancing keenly into his nephew's face, he replied,—

'The girl is here; more sorrow to me, and to you too, George, if you seek her out. Accursed was that day when those two women first came to Cruna!'

George stared in amazement as he asked,—

'Why, what has she done?'

'Ask rather what has she not done?' exclaimed Mr Dunroon. 'The girl has the "evil eye," and 'tis only by

carefully pleasing her and her accursed relative that the land is fruitful.'

'Nina O'Connor a witch! ridiculous!' ejaculated George. A residence in the south had effectually erased from his mind all the innocent conceptions which he had imbibed in Cruna, and rendered him sceptical in more matters than that of witchcraft.

'I tell you it is *true*, George!' doggedly asserted his uncle. 'Twas only with one glance of her eye that she withered up the corn in that field. The girl is accursed in the sight of heaven; never come near her while you are in Cruna, and never again mention her name to me!'

The latter part of the behest was obeyed to the letter. Being perfectly acquainted with his uncle's obdurate, narrow-minded, superstitious nature, the lad knew full well that any attempt on his part to shake the ideas which he had conceived about Nina would be utterly futile, and perhaps would only serve to make his uncle's conviction more bitter.

Accordingly he held his peace. His mind, however, unlike his lips, was bound by no restrictions. During that day, his thoughts constantly turned to Nina, and, contrary to the sage advice of his relative, he determined to seek her out on the first opportunity. Far from shaking his determination, Nina's reputed skill in the 'black arts' only served to make it more sure, and inspire in him a livelier interest in the girl.

While he had been absent from the island, Nina had been little in his mind; other impressions had crowded upon him, entirely sweeping her from his thoughts; now that he was back again, the remembrance of his childhood's days was recalled to him, and the picture of Nina O'Connor was inseparably mixed up in all his reflections. Eight years had passed since he had seen her, and George fell to picturing the changes which those eight years might have wrought in her, and he wondered if he would find in the woman the same affectionate heart and gentle nature he had known and loved in the child. In such reflections George was not alone. Ever since Nina had heard of his projected return to the island, she on her

part had been conjuring up pictures of her boyish playmate, and wondering what he would think when he found her thus friendless, shunned and despised as it were by every human soul.

Despite the gentleness with which the girl had submitted to the tyranny which had been exercised over her, there was in her nature a portion of that quiet resolve which was so marked a characteristic of her aunt. The assertions concerning her, she had treated with the utmost scorn, coming as they did from people whom she had learned to despise ; but now, she thought, the case would be different ; and, on that night when she had stood against the door-post, watching the flickering light in the bay, she had involuntarily asked herself the question,—

‘ Will George treat me as these people do ? ’

Her thoughts of him were filled with pleasant associations. She knew that in his youth he had possessed a kindly disposition, and she thought that, after eight years residence in the south, he must return a gentleman, with expanded mind and enlightened ideas, a being in every way fit to rule in Cruna. Although she herself had been brought up within the lonely limits of the island, with no wider experience of humanity than the superstitious islanders, Nina’s mind was of a different mould. Had she been reared solely under their auspices, the girl might necessarily have inherited much of their legendary lore, but Aileen O’Connor, who had dwelt in more enlightened climes, regarded the islanders, including the master himself, as a set of creatures whose only possible claim to humanity was that of form, certainly not of intellect. Secretly hating and despising every one, and more especially the master himself, she had endeavoured to bring Nina round to her own lights. She had succeeded so far as to brighten up the girl’s intelligence, and give her more enlightened ideas of human nature, and the world in general, than she could possibly have obtained had she been cast solely upon her own resources.

For George’s return Nina had looked as for that of an old friend. During the eight years of their separation,

she, having no other excitement in her mind, had been constantly thinking of, nay, almost looking forward to the time when the boy should come back and brighten up her dreary existence.

No sooner, therefore, did he return to the island, than she lengthened her daily walks in the hope of meeting him. She knew that, even were he so inclined, he would not dare to seek her at her home, for, ever since that day, now so many years ago, when, with wild imprecations, the old woman had driven him from her door, he had never once attempted to cross the threshold. So Nina looked for him abroad, but for many days her search was vain.

One evening, however, after a long stroll, she sat down to rest upon the grass-covered crags, when she was suddenly startled by the report of a gun. She rose and looked around her, but she could see no one. Presently, however, a hare came bounding along, and, when a few yards from her feet, fell dead. Trembling, she glanced around again. Almost immediately the sportsman became visible. First came a dog, a black retriever, which, with nose to the ground, was closely following the track of the hare; at no very great distance behind the dog hurried the slight figure of a young man, clad in a grey shooting-suit, carrying a gun on his shoulder, and closely followed by a coarse-looking fisher-boy.

One by one the party appeared on the top of a hill which rose a distance from the crags, cutting off the flat sweep of land. Nina looked intently at the sportsman, while he, with his eyes fixed on the dog, came walking direct towards her.

At first the face seemed perfectly unknown to her, but, as the man drew nearer, and she got a better view of the features, she gradually seemed to recognise in him her old friend, George Dunroon. The recognition became complete when at length the young man called to his dog in a voice that, despite the changes of years, she knew well.

Breathless with his run, George paused within a few yards of where the girl stood, and stooped to lift the

hare which the dog had deposited at his feet. On turning to cast it to the boy, his eyes suddenly fell upon Nina, who stood quietly watching his movements.

He started, paused, the next moment he strode forward, holding forth his hand.

‘Nina!’ he exclaimed, as he clasped her fingers in his hand, and looked admiringly into her face. ‘I declare I hardly knew you; what a pretty girl you have grown!’

Nina opened her lips to speak, but, in glancing over George’s shoulder, her eyes rested upon a sight which made her burst into a fit of somewhat petulant laughter.

The boy who had followed the young master, horrified at the sudden encounter with Nina, had hurriedly seized the hare, and anxious, no doubt, to put a safe distance between himself and the girl, was engaged in making a most ignominious retreat.

George was about to call him, when Nina put her hand on his arm,—

‘You need not do that,’ she said, ‘he’ll never turn.’

‘Why not?’ asked George.

Nina looked full into his face as she said, in a half-sarcastic, half-bitter tone,—

‘Because, sir, he wouldn’t like to be bewitched.’

In a moment George remembered his uncle’s accusation, which, till then, he had almost forgotten.

‘The little imp,’ he muttered, half-angrily; then turning towards the girl, he said, ‘perhaps we are as well without him, for, now we have met, I don’t mean to let you escape so easily, Nina. Where are you going?’

‘Just along the shore to my home.’

‘Then I will walk with you,’ answered George, instinctively assuming towards the girl all his old protecting manner; ‘’tis a long time since we had a ramble together, isn’t it, Nina?’

‘Indeed it is, sir,’ replied Nina softly, as with eyes fixed on the ground she seemed to travel back over the vista of those past years.

‘Have you missed me much?’ asked George.

‘Yes,’ answered Nina, in the same soft tone. ‘It has felt lonely.’

‘And you are glad to see me back?’

I am, sir,’ was the simple reply.

Silence followed. Both now seemed in a waking dream, occupied with a pleasant retrospect,—their eyes on the quiet sea.

‘Come, Nina,’ George said quietly, as he approached her side, ‘as we go along you must tell me all that has happened to you since we parted.’

Side by side the two walked along in the fading light, and ere long Nina was talking to George in as free and unrestrained a manner as she had been wont to talk in years gone by. Although changed so much outwardly, George possessed the same frank, kindly nature that had been noteworthy in the boy, and ere she had been half-an-hour in his company, Nina felt no longer abashed and reserved, but rather as if she were in the presence of an intimate friend. When they parted, she gave him her hand as frankly as she had been wont to give her lips in the old times.

The intimacy recommenced under such favourable auspices, soon ripened into strong friendship. Ere long, Mr Dunroon observed that George, studiously bent upon visiting all his old haunts, seemed to have a particular fancy for visiting those haunts alone. Whenever his uncle proposed to accompany him, the prepared expedition was always either abandoned altogether, or the master’s society shufflingly dispensed with. Altogether, George’s conduct was inexplicable. Day after day his hound lay lazily in the sunshine, and his guns grew rusted from long disuse. The master, who himself had been little of a saint, was by no means inclined to attribute saintship to others. He knew there must be some great cause for his nephew’s conduct, and he soon discovered what he had all along suspected,—that, despite his sage advice, the boy had been ‘bewitched,’ and that his pretended expeditions over the island resolved themselves into nothing more or less than clandestine meetings with Nina.

Indeed, either for good or ill, Nina quickly exerted a great influence over the young master,—which influence

his uncle naturally attributed to the 'evil eye,' or some other of her aunt's diabolic arts. Certain it was, that the friendship between the two strengthened each day, and that George soon discovered he was never so happy as when lounging by Nina's side, and looking into her face.

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'You have been here two months to-day, and, do you remember, this is the place where we met?'

Nina sat on the grass, looking into George's face, as he reclined close to the edge of the crag.

'Two months!' he repeated. 'It has passed like a dream.'

'You have not wearied, sir?'

Instead of replying, George rose, and took his seat close by the girl's side.

'Nina.'

'Yes.'

'Why don't you call me George as you used to do?'

Nina looked into his face as she said slowly, 'Because it is different now, sir.'

'Why should it be different, Nina? We are the same—you and I,—what difference should a few years make?'

Nina rose hastily, and stood before him.

'Indeed, you yourself should know what difference it makes. We are not children now. You are the young master, and I—'

'And you, Nina, are what I prize more than anything else in the world,' said George, as, standing before her, he took her hands. 'Tell me, child, do you care for me? Do you think of me sometimes, as I think of you?—do you—'

He paused. Nina's hand trembled. She looked into her companion's eyes and remained silent.

'Nina,' continued George passionately, as he clasped her round the waist; 'speak, darling,—do not turn from me. Answer me now, do you love me, Nina?'

'Love you? yes, indeed I do!' said Nina softly. 'But there is little wonder in that. You are the dearest friend—the only friend—I have in the wide world; but

I am different to you, and 'tis strange, I think, that you should care for me.'

'Nina, do you love me?'

'Indeed, yes,' Nina replied; and, looking questioningly into his face, she asked, 'Will you always love me?'

'Always, darling?'

For a time she was silent, with her eyes cast on the sea; then she said, half-smiling, half-sad, 'Although I am a witch?'

George laughed.

'There is the pledge!' he said, as he kissed her on the lips.

CHAPTER XII.

IF the suspicion of Nina's unholy propensities had hitherto been somewhat vague and indistinct, it soon became confirmed by one and all beyond the shadow of a doubt; for where could be found the person in this matter-of-fact world who would still hold to a girl's innocence when she had been seen successively, by moonlight, in the company of a bear—a creature half-cow, half-man, and a monster in every lincament, resembling the merman of the caves? Substantial evidence of these facts was in no way wanting, for the inhabitants of Cruna were armed against the girl *cap-à-pie*. There was old Dunbeg, for instance, ready and willing to swear on the Book that only seven days before, as he stood at nightfall on the Moruig Dubh, he had, himself unseen, watched the girl approach the dreaded Creag-na-Ghoill, and from thence, at a signal from her, had emerged a shadowy monster, which again and again clasped her in its arms. Young Gannon, too, strongly averred that, as he was one night returning in his skiff from the fishing, he had, with his own eyes, seen Nina sitting amidst the rocks on the shore, half reclining in the arms of a man, whose lower extremities bore a striking resemblance to

those of a seal. At last the case became so strong that the inhabitants of Cruna Island felt impelled to lay the facts before their master, and to beg that the witch, and her old familiar, should forthwith be exiled from that land.

To the wonder of the islanders, however, Mr Dunroon exhibited towards the outcasts considerably more leniency than did his people. He was a cautious man, whose nature was utterly impenetrable to the gaze of those benighted islanders. Knowing his nephew's fancy for the girl, he had substantial reason for connecting George Dunroon with these midnight apparitions. To his nephew he said nothing of his suspicions; he knew that George was headstrong, that opposition would be useless; and though he had no idea of allowing matters to proceed as they were, he chose to gain his end by some surer and more secret means.

A personal interview with Nina he dreaded, partly on account of her reputed skill in the 'black arts,' and partly because there was something in the girl's face which stirred up the latent sorrow in his soul, and made him very sad. Was it the evil in her eye which caused the man so persistently to shrink from her glance? Or was it some faint familiar gleam which recalled to him the memory of other days? Certain it is, that he had never looked upon Nina's face without some stifled emotion rising within his breast, so that day after day, month after month, he shunned her, dreading to meet her gaze, and cloaking his shrinking cowardice under the garb of superstition. Whatever he did must be done secretly, and in a measure through the aid of his people, for in this matter the master did not think it expedient to declare open hostility. Not that he feared Nina only—the girl herself was quite in his power—and were she alone concerned, the matter would be comparatively easy; but of Aileen O'Connor he had a genuine and deep-set terror. He knew that in his youth he had done her manifold wrongs; he remembered how she had left the island vowing vengeance against him; and although at the time the matter had impressed him little, yet since

Aileen had returned to the island—an old woman—the master had felt considerably more ill at ease.

From the first the old woman's proceedings had puzzled him ; but what astonished him more than all was, that in her later years she should return and live in the very island which had been the scene of her former misfortunes. Of her life, he knew nothing, but he felt that the old woman nursed the wrongs of the girl, and that still Aileen O'Connor cherished towards him that malignant dislike which he himself had formerly been instrumental in arousing. Dreading, therefore, to mix himself openly in the matter, he determined to feed the superstition of his people, and thereby rid himself of an incumbrance which had been torturing his soul for years.

Silently and keenly he watched his nephew's face, as one who reads a written page, and day by day he saw that the girl's influence over his soul was deepening. Though George had never disclosed to any mortal man his love for Nina, his uncle had partly solved the young man's secret, and he determined to fully unravel the mystery ere he finally formed his own plans.

Meanwhile George, utterly unmindful of the moral eruption which was working in his uncle's mind, continued to pass his time in careless indolence. Indifferent to all but love, he spent his evenings in Nina's company, looking into her face, and listening to her voice, while the master loomed like a satyr in the background, longing, yet fearing, to put his veto upon the event which he saw approaching.

'Nina,' said George, one evening, as, half reclining on a patch of grass which covered the top of a cliff, he looked up into her face, 'have you felt happier, darling, since I came?'

Nina laughed ; and putting her hand into that which was stretched towards her, asked,—

'How many times is it that you have asked me that?'

'A dozen, I should think.'

'Then why do you ask again?'

'Because I like to hear you answer me ; I like to listen to your loving voice, Nina, darling. I could sit here looking into your face like this for ever !'

‘Indeed, you would be weary.’

‘Never, child ;—I love you far too well ;—you are my life, my second nature ; with you by my side, I would brave the world.’

‘You would ?’

‘Yes, I will swear it if you wish, my darling !’

‘But suppose all the world was against me ? It *is* against me, I am crushed down and despised by every one, save you !’

‘Pshaw ! you know nothing of the world, Nina. What does it matter for the opinion of people like these ? You will soon be beyond their power, for you will be their mistress, and then, if you wish it, Nina, we will go south, leave all dark thoughts behind us, and begin life together, happy in our love then, as we are now,’—and he put out both his arms, and, folding them around Nina’s waist, drew her nearer to his side.

The dark cliff, on the top of which they sat, loomed in the dusky twilight. Beneath them the mighty ocean surged heavily, and above their heads stretched the heavens radiant with stars. Around them the shades of night were slowly gathering, all seemed fading away in a soft, vaporous light, no object was clearly perceptible ; all was vague and shadowy, like things in a dream. For a time the two sat silent, overawed, as it were, by the utter stillness of the scene, for nothing stirred, no breeze was on either land or sea, but ever and anon the owl hooted from its nest in the ivied crag, and the corncrake cried from the corn which grew scarcely a hundred yards behind them. Presently Nina stirred.

‘How dark it is getting ! I had forgotten about the night coming, and about my aunt too, who sits in the cabin. I must go, George, I have lingered with you far too long !’

And Nina leapt to her feet, drew more tightly around her the small checkered handkerchief which covered her neck and shoulders, and turned her back upon the ocean. Suddenly she started, and caught her companion’s sleeve, as she asked, in a suppressed voice,—‘What’s that ?’

‘What, Nina ?’

‘Don’t you see that dark figure stealing along the edge of the corn-field? Why, ’tis the master himself!’

‘So it is! What can he be doing here, and at this hour, I wonder? Come to see the fairies dance, or to attend a witches’ midnight meeting? I’ll speak to him.’

But Nina kept her hand firmly upon his arm, and held him back.

‘Not now, George. See! he does not wish you to do so either.’

As she spoke, there was a gentle rustle amongst the corn, and the figure of Mr Dunroon disappeared amidst it from their sight.

George turned to Nina.

‘Why, how pale you are,’ he said, taking her face between his two hands, and holding it up to his. ‘Are you afraid of my uncle, Nina?’

The girl withdrew a few paces into the shadow.

‘No, I do not fear him,’ she replied, though her voice trembled, ‘but a strange feeling comes over me when I meet him, such a strange feeling that I cannot understand. I wonder,’ she added, in a lower voice, ‘will he ever do me any harm?’

George laughed.

‘What, Nina, you superstitious too?’

‘No, indeed, I am not; but I know the master dislikes me now more than any one of his people!’

‘Never fear, little one, he will not dare to harm you. Why should he? You have lived here undisturbed all these years; why should he hurt you now?’

‘I do not know, George,’ Nina replied softly, ‘only I would rather that the master was away.’

‘Tush, Nina, ’tis a foolish fancy that you must not cherish; remember, I am here now to protect you from danger, should any threaten. Now, darling, let me see your face, and tell me you are happy!’

Raising her head, Nina looked into her lover’s eyes, and smiled. At that moment she felt supremely glad in the glow of a first youthful passion, and as George drew her near to him, bent above and kissed her cheek, the

past shadows and misgivings which had momentarily darkened her soul were dissolved.

Thus the two stood, forgetful of all save themselves, while not many yards behind them loomed a gaunt figure with silvern hair, whose eyes were fixed upon the lovers in malicious dislike, while his lips muttered,—

‘She has bewitched him, as I thought, but she shall suffer, she shall suffer!’

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The summer months sped past, and autumn came; the corn was cut and gathered, the sweet scent of newly-mown hay was gone from the air, and Cruna Island lay dark and barren, canopied by a cold, clear, grey sky. The autumn came, and with it came the time for George’s departure.

As the days rolled past swiftly, one after another, and that day drew near when he was to leave the island and return for a time to his studies in the smoky southern city, George grew sad and disheartened, oppressed by a feeling of apprehension, a vague foreshadowing of evil, for which he could not account.

Nightly he sought out Nina, whispering words of comfort in her ear, and drinking them again from her loving lips.

Most willingly would George have renounced all thoughts of departure, and stayed on the lonely island by Nina’s side; but that could not be; he must go—struggle against the fates as he might, they still retained the mastery. At last the eve of the dreaded day arrived.

‘One little piece of hair, Nina, to kiss to-morrow when I am on the ocean,’ he asked, as he stood with Nina on the beach, beside her cabin for the last time. Nina drew back.

‘No, no!’

‘Why, darling?’

‘Because,—I *am* superstitious, dear; you might never see me again!’

‘Nonsense, darling, do not talk so; to-night, let us be happy.’

‘So we will, if we are never so again. Oh, George, I

have been most happy since you came, but it will be weary here without you.'

'It will not be for long, Nina. Before you have realised that I am gone, I shall be back again. Promise me not to weary, promise to keep bright and well till I come back to claim you!'

'I will try!'

'Nina, why is it that you linger?'

It was the querulous voice of Aileen O'Connor calling from within the house.

Nina turned.

'I am coming, Aunt Aileen,' then she held tight on to George's arm. 'Tis not again that we'll meet, and we must just say good-bye here. I cannot come out and see you go. I could not bear it, with all those people staring at me, and the master, too, maybe. But,' she added quickly, 'I'll see you from the Creag-na-Ghoill!'

'I shall see you there?'

'Maybe.'

'One month, Nina; remember then I shall be back to claim you openly, and dare them all.'

Nina shuddered.

'Are you cold, darling?'

'A little; 'tis like winter weather this. I'm thinking the snow will be here before a month.'

'Nina, do you hear? Nina!' The old woman's voice was more querulous than before.

'I must go,' said Nina, as she began to move reluctantly away.

George's arms were at once enfolded around her. Gently placing her head on his breast, he kissed her again and again. For a moment she lay pillowed thus, then, with a half-stifled sob, she broke from his arms, and uttering a scarcely audible 'Good-bye,' ran into the hut.

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The next morning the sails of the cutter, which had brought the young master to Cruna, and which was to take him thence, were early set, and long before midday a crowd of people were collected on the shore watching

the vessel. But as, with her white sails gleaming in the light, the vessel sailed swiftly across the bay, past towering crags and lofty caverns, George became more agitated.

With a keen, passionate glance, he diligently scanned the shore ;—as it neared the crag commonly known as the Creag-na-Ghoill, he drew from his pocket a white handkerchief, and holding it on high, waved and waved again. Then looking up, he saw Nina standing above him, on the extreme verge of the crag. In her hand she, too, held a handkerchief, which she waved once, twice—then the handkerchief came fluttering down towards the ocean, as Nina moved back from the crag and was gone.

CHAPTER XIII.

No sooner had the young man left for the south than Mr Dunroon began to ponder as to the best means of carrying out his plans concerning Nina. Of one thing he was certain, that the girl must be got rid of before George's return, for were the two once again allowed to meet, all hopes of putting an end to the connection would be utterly futile. The scheme, however, seemed by no means easy of accomplishment, for since the master had thwarted that first insurrection, his people were not over anxious to resume their application.

As a witch, Nina had come to be feared almost as much as her aunt ; and such was the superstition of the people, that they dreaded to turn her from the land, lest the curse which she would surely hurl upon their heads should blight their agricultural prospects for that season at least. So the time passed on, the inhabitants of Cruna Island began to look for the young master's return, and still nothing had been done. Mr Dunroon, fuming under his disappointment, looked about him for a means of rescue, but none seemed at hand. What

was to be done must be done quickly, or George would be back and spoil all.

The girl once away, the master believed that he would be safe ; for, in his excitement, he quite overlooked the fact that if they were once separated at Cruna, the lovers might ultimately meet elsewhere. Seeing that in this matter he could expect little voluntary help from his people, Mr Dunroon resolved to take the matter into his own hands, and gain his end. Thus he remained, silent but watchful, awaiting the opportunity which at last came.

After her first sting of grief was over, Nina O'Connor recommenced her solitary walks. Alone she visited the spots where she had walked with George. Every place associated with him was dear to her. Indeed, the only gratification which she now felt was in brooding over the spots where they had wandered together ; for, as she did so, she almost heard his voice in her ear whispering to her words of love.

Now, if Nina's walks were apparently harmless in character, they soon caused a revolution in the island, for no sooner did the girl emerge into the open air, than a series of calamities fell upon the land. One of Maguire's cows went dry and sickened on the very first day that Nina appeared. Certainly Mr Dunroon had stroked the cow ; but then there was nothing in that. The islanders thought 'twas but kindly of the master to notice the beast ; it must be the witch's work.

Two days after this incident one of Andy Beg's finest heifers was seen to drop stone dead scarcely a hundred yards from Nina's feet. The heifer was known to be in perfect health, for only a short time before its death it had eaten a wisp of hay from the master's very hand. A little later, one of the islanders offered to Mr Dunroon a valuable filly which he had for sale. The master was pleased with the animal, but before concluding the bargain he wanted to test the powers of the horse in a ride over the island.

From a crowd of admiring islanders he galloped off along the road which led past the hut of Aileen O'Con-

nor. As he came within sight of the cabin he saw Nina standing by the roadside, watching him with strange earnestness. Scarcely had the pony trotted half a mile beyond her when it was seized with violent quiverings; it foamed at the mouth, gnashed its teeth, threw up its head, and became altogether unmanageable.

The master dismounted, a crowd quickly gathered; in the midst of which stood the owner, furious and desperate with rage and mortification, as he saw his pony expire before his very eyes. What human soul could continue to doubt the substantiality of a fact when it was brought before him in so very marked a manner?

As the islanders looked upon the animal, they, one and all, became furious as the owner himself. Misfortune after misfortune had fallen upon them, and although the master generously offered at once to pay the price of the pony, and become himself the loser for the deed, the islanders resolved to take the law into their own hands, and right their private wrongs.

After Mr Dunroon had galloped along the road, and passed from her sight, Nina turned, and began to descend the rocky path which led to her home. Her mind was full of strange misgivings, and the expression of the man's eyes as they had momentarily glanced into her face haunted her.

'He means me no good,' she thought; 'why does the sight of him fill me with such fear, I wonder? I wish George was here!'

The door of the cabin stood ajar. Nina pushed it open, and entered. Instead of sitting in her accustomed place, Aileen O'Connor stood upon the hearth, diligently pulling together the smouldering turf-sods. In a moment Nina was beside her.

'Shall I sort the fire, Aunt Aileen?'

The ghastly face was turned towards her, and the querulous voice replied,—

'Can you not see that *I* am sorting it?'

Nina remained silent, too well accustomed to the querulous tone to make reply. Presently Aileen placed the tongs on the hearth, and resumed her accus-

toned seat, while Nina quietly retired to the window recess.

‘Where is it you have been, Nina?’ asked Aileen at length.

‘On the cliffs above,’ was the gentle reply.

‘Ay, you are ever on the cliffs,’ the old woman soliloquised; ‘thinking little of me, though I sit here alone for ever. ’Tis the way of the world—the old are forgotten and neglected. ’Tis ever the way, and I share the fate of the rest.’

Advancing from the window, Nina approached her aunt’s chair, put a hand on each shoulder, and bent her face towards her.

‘Dear Aunt Aileen, shall I read to you?’

‘Read to me? Why should you?’ was the sharp answer; ‘that, too, is a burden, I suppose?’

With a low sigh, the girl again retired to the window recess, and resting her arms on the sill, looked out upon the ocean. There was silence for a time, then the old woman spoke again.

‘Why are you not reading, Nina?’ she asked, and without reply the girl lifted from the shelf the old stained Bible, and began to read aloud, while Aileen crossed her bony hands upon her knee, and fixed her lack-lustre eye upon her tombstone.

Scarcely half-an-hour had passed, and Nina’s voice still sounded softly in the room, when a rush of many feet broke the silence without, and suddenly a crowd of people swooped upon the cabin, entirely surrounding it. Before Nina could move, the door was rudely pushed open, and the crowd poured into the room with a fierce cry,—

‘The witches! Out with the witches!’

Nina rose to her feet and confronted them, but ere she could utter a word she was roughly seized by the wrist, forced out of the door, and hemmed round by the crowd without, while on all hands the fiercest denunciations were hissed into her ear. In the midst of the crowd Nina stood confounded, utterly taken aback by the suddenness of the attack; but soon she

recovered, and wrenching herself free, looked defiantly around.

‘Stand back!’ she cried, ‘stand back! What have I done to be served like this?’

‘Hear the witch! hear the witch!’ was roared on every hand.

‘Who killed my cow?’ asked one, as a savage face confronted her.

‘And who killed my horse—my best horse? The devil blast you!’

Nina looked calmly into the eyes which were glaring upon her.

‘I know nothing of what you say; but I never worked you harm—no, not one of you.’

A fierce, derisive laugh was the reply. Ere the girl could speak again she felt herself lifted from her feet and borne towards the ocean. Wildly she gazed around for help. The faces looming about her were fierce and pitiless, almost demoniac in their savage brutality; the sea of human faces hemmed her in on every hand; but as Nina glanced despairingly around, her eyes fell upon an uncovered head, which was close beside her, mingling with the rest—the white head of Mr Dunroon. Gathering together all her strength, the girl made a tremendous effort, dashed through the crowd, caught the master by the sleeve and cried for mercy.

‘Think what it would be to have your own child treated so,’ she said, ‘and have some pity for me! Think what it is to turn on a helpless girl and an old woman!—you have power—never let them harm us!’

The man turned from her, muttering fiercely,—

‘They shall not harm you, but I’ll have no witches on Cruna. You shall go, and never return again!’

Nina’s face grew paler, but she retained her hold.

‘Turn us from Cruna!’ she said, almost breathlessly; ‘as well kill us outright as send us away into the world, where we have no kindred and no friends! Take back your word, sir, and never do that!’

The man roughly endeavoured to shake her away.

‘Let go, I say; I’ll have no witches here!’

Still holding on his arm, Nina exclaimed,—

‘Why are you so cruel? What have we done that you should serve us so? For years you have hated me. I know it; I have seen it in your face. You are a hard, cruel man. ’Tis you, I know, and only you, who have turned these people against me. But you will not be suffered to go on so. Take care, old man, lest God’s curse fall upon you for what you do!’

Nina stood, wild with excitement, her hand convulsively clasped around the master’s arm, while her face loomed before him deathly pale. What was it in the girl’s face that penetrated into his heart, and almost softened his hard resolve?

As the man gazed upon those features, his frame quivered through and through; every line, every feature seemed familiar to him, and her bright brown eyes held him for a time with almost magnetic influence. He gazed breathlessly upon her; then, like one suddenly relieved from a terrible spell, he breathed again, covered his eyes with his hand, and cowered before her, muttering under his breath,—

‘Begone, begone!’

Suddenly there was a crash and a loud cry. The crowd congregated on the beach uttered a brutal shout of savage glee.

Turning round, Nina beheld a tongue of bright red flame flaring high into the air. They had set fire to the cabin; the only house which the girl ever remembered was burning to the ground before her eyes. With a wild shriek she threw up her arms and cried,—

‘What have you done—what have you done? My Aunt Aileen—where is my poor aunt?’

In her agony the girl would have rushed through the crowd to the burning cabin, when her arm was caught in a powerful grip, and, looking back, she saw her aunt standing close by—a gaunt, spectral figure in the fiery light. Her ashen cheeks had in them no tinge of colour. Apparently unmoved by the terrible situation, Aileen O’Connor stood still as a statue, with one of her bony hands clasped around Nina’s arm, and her lustreless eyes

gazing sternly upon the crouching figure of the man. Nina's heart bounded with joy.

'You are safe!' she cried; 'dear Aunt Aileen, you are safe!'

'Yes,' replied the old woman, in her usual measured, querulous tones, but with a strange light in her eyes. 'I am saved for this, to stand on the shore of Cruna, and see the master turn Nina O'Connor from her home.' Then turning to the master, who stood before her like one bewitched, she said, in harsh grating tones,—'*My* time has come. I have waited long, but it has come at last. You remember the last words of Aileen, the crushed down, heart-broken Aileen O'Connor?' Then pointing with her long thin finger towards Nina, she cried,—'Hurl your curses upon *her* as you hurled them upon *me*. Crush her, despise her, thrust her away as you did a while ago; the very sight of her is hateful to you; she knows it, and I know it. She hates you, she despises you, for through *you*, remember through *you*, she is a wretched outcast!'

The old man stood speechless, while the death-like eyes of the woman were fixed with a hungry light upon his face. Closer the crowd pressed around with furious faces, crying in Irish,—

'She is mad, she will bewitch the master, cast her away!'

The girl clung wildly to her aunt, and turned her face upon the people.

'You shall not harm her,' she cried. 'Aunt—dear Aunt Aileen, come away, we will go, we will leave this hateful place, and these cruel people, and we will never come back again.'

As she looked into the girl's face, the old woman uttered a hard, cold laugh.

'See how she clings to me,' she cried, almost fiercely, as she turned her eyes again upon Mr Dunroon. 'To *me*, though I have scarcely given her a kind word, a kind look, she clings to me, and you she hates and loathes. Think of this, remember this, on your dying bed!'

'Woman, what do you mean?' cried the master.

‘Get you gone, I say, and never come here again. Curse on the hour when your face came first to torture me!’

The stern face of the old woman broke into a ghastly smile.

‘I am going,’ she said, ‘but *she* is going with me. The girl is with the old woman, whilst you are left childless. If I am an outcast, she is an outcast too; remember that!’

‘Curses on you both! what is the girl to me?’

The old woman looked almost triumphantly into his face as she replied,—

‘Think on *that* when she is gone away!’

Dunroon turned fiercely from her.

‘Take them away!’ he cried; ‘turn them out! Drag them from my sight!’

The crowd again pressed around the two, and Nina clung close to her aunt as if to protect her, as she whispered,—

‘Come away, Aunt Aileen, come away. He is a cruel man!’

Yielding to the girl, Aileen O’Connor moved slowly down the beach, her gaunt figure straight as an arrow, and her head towering above the heads of those who pressed around her. Slowly the night shadows were gathering around them, the sky covered here and there with thick masses of cloud, loomed heavily above the earth. On the distant mountain tops patches of snow gleamed in the light. Surrounded by the jeering crowd the two figures moved slowly oceanward. Her face pale as death, and her eyes bright and tearless, Nina walked along half-dazed, half-stupefied, deaf to the taunts which were constantly hissed into her ear. Once she paused, and looked back long and lovingly at the spot where she had spent so many years of her life. No vestige of the hut remained, but a mass of smouldering black ruins were scattered at the base of the rock. At the sight, her face became paler still, her brow contracted, her lips compressed, but without a sigh she turned and walked in silence until the two reached the edge of the sea. There they paused. An unforeseen difficulty arose.

The islanders, who were so anxious to banish the outcasts, seemed, nevertheless, most unwilling to convey them from thence, fearing that in their spite the two women might exert their evil influence over any smack which they boarded, and so cause its destruction.

The scene now became more boisterous than before, and the two unfortunates would probably have sustained some injury from the people had the uproar not been suddenly stopped. The skipper of a yawl, which lay in the bay prepared for starting, generously volunteered, out of pity, to take the women on board. The ship's boat was waiting on the shore, and into it Aileen O'Connor stepped without a word. Nina should have followed, but suddenly she turned, faced the master, who had followed them down, and fell upon the shore at his feet.

'Oh, sir, have pity!' she cried; 'maybe you have a kindly heart after all; never turn us away homeless and friendless as we are!'

The man thrust her away.

'Away with you!' he cried, and Nina was seized roughly, cast into the boat, and ere she had finally recovered from her dazed amazement, she was seated on the deck of the yawl, which was sailing swiftly out of the harbour. Silently the girl sat, with her eyes fixed wildly upon the shore, as the vessel struck out to the open sea, and Cruna Island faded away into a mist. So concentrated had her gaze become that she was blind to all else, utterly unconscious that another vessel, a large cutter, with all her sails set and filled, was ploughing swiftly through the water, and making straight for the land which they had left.

CHAPTER XIV.

SCARCELY an hour had passed since the yawl had faded from view, and the crowd was still congregated on the beach, when the cutter, which had passed the yawl in the

open water outside Cruna, rounded the northern point of the island, and sailed swiftly into the bay. No sooner had it come to a safe anchorage than a boat put off, and pulled towards the shore, and the islanders beheld, seated in the stern, none other than the young master himself.

George had not been expected so soon, yet his sudden appearance caused no consternation in the minds of the islanders. They knew nothing of the relations between him and Nina.

The master himself had left the beach, and returned to his house, and as yet knew nothing of his nephew's arrival. Eagerly the islanders crowded to the water's edge to welcome the young man home. However, he paid little or no attention to their salutes. They soon noticed that something unusual had occurred to bring him back so soon amongst them; for George wore a broad, black band upon his hat, and his face was whiter than the foam of the sea. Leaping out on to the shingle, he hurriedly passed through the ranks of men surrounding him.

'What vessel was that we passed yonder?' he asked, without raising his eyes from the ground.

'Twas a yawl, sir, that came from the south a week ago, and is bound homeward.'

'They must have been mad to sail out to-night. There's a storm brewing, and an awful sea rising out in the open.'

The islanders glanced meaningly into each other's faces, but, without once looking towards them, George hurried on direct for his uncle's house. His manner was singularly agitated, his brow knit, his pale face troubled by an expression of mental agony. On reaching the house he quietly entered, and, walking along the lobby, paused before a half-open door. The room which it revealed was cast in heavy shadow, but through the dim light could be faintly seen the figure of Mr Dunroon, seated upon the hearth, in a great arm-chair, with his bowed head resting upon his hand, and his eyes bent upon the ground, while the bright firelight fell upon his furrowed face and silver hair. The expression of his

face was more peevish, the features more pinched than ever, and as he sat there in the gleam of the firelight, he looked worn-out and wretched with sorrow and years. Advancing into the room, George paused beside the chair, and placed his hand on the old man's shoulder, at which the master rose to his feet, and faced him, exclaiming,—

‘George! so soon!’ Then, as his eyes fell upon his nephew's face and dress, he asked, in a softer tone,— ‘What has happened, my boy? Is it ill news that has brought you back to Cruna?’

George looked steadfastly into the old man's face, and, still keeping his hand on his shoulder, said quietly,—

‘Good news, and ill news, uncle. My mother is dead.’

‘Dead!’ echoed Mr Dunroon faintly; then his dull eyes grew almost tender in expression as he looked in his nephew's face.

‘You are friendless now, George,’ he said; ‘friendless as I am; but we will keep together now, my boy. Cruna shall be your home.’

George half turned away.

‘Cruna shall never belong to me,’ he said; ‘you are not friendless, as you suppose, uncle, for your own child still lives.’

A quiver passed through Dunroon's frame.

‘My child!’ he exclaimed. ‘George, I have no child, she was taken from me before I saw her; ay, eighteen years ago she was drowned at sea!’ As he spoke, the old man's voice rang with a low wail of sorrow.

‘She was not drowned,’ continued George, ‘for she was never on the ship! Listen, uncle. At the last moment your wife started alone, leaving her child with my mother. The vessel went down, and you believed the mother and child were drowned; but the child was safe in the south. My mother never forgave you, uncle, for refusing to help my father out of some trouble; she declared that through your hardness you caused his death; so when she heard that you were grieving for your child, she thought little of your suffering, and was only bent on making me your heir.’

George paused. The old man trembled ; but, without raising his head, he merely said, in a low voice,—

‘Go on, my boy ; go on !’

‘You can partly guess the rest, uncle. I was sent here to console you, and your own child was detained. My mother kept her for a few years, but fearing the secret might ooze out, she at length entrusted her to the care of a woman-servant in the house. That woman was Aileen O’Connor. The two were sent away together to the States of America, and for a time nothing was heard of them. Now, uncle, mark the terrible decrees of Providence. Some years ago these same two arrived at Cruna, and ever since then your own child has been living near you, like any common peasant girl !’

Up to this moment the old man had sat silent, but as George uttered the last words, the dull eyes flashed with an unearthly light ; the features grew more contracted. Rising to his feet he faced his nephew, and in a quivering voice exclaimed,—

‘Nina O’Connor !’

‘Yes, uncle ; Nina O’Connor !’

Mr Dunroon’s hand clenched, and his face grew pale as death.

‘It is false !’ he exclaimed. ‘*She* is no child of mine !’

Amazed at this unexpected change, George stood for a moment utterly speechless ; then he stepped forward, and put his hand on the old man’s shoulder.

‘I tell you it is true, uncle,’ he replied. ‘My own mother confessed it to me on her death-bed !’

‘I say it is false, George !’ cried the master vehemently ; ‘every word of it is false ! The girl is no kin of mine, but of hers—of that accursed woman—Aileen O’Connor. Didn’t I know she’d bring me no good ? Didn’t I know that evil would come with her ? I felt it—I knew it. But I will thwart her, I tell you, even if the devil himself is leagued with her against me.’

‘Uncle,’ said George, ‘do not rave so, think of it sensibly ; my mother has done you the greatest wrong, but you must forgive her now, and rejoice at getting back your child.’

‘She is not my child!’ cried the old man, turning fiercely upon his nephew. ‘Don’t you hear what I say, George? she is no child of mine! But they are all against me, and you have joined them too—*you* above all. Haven’t I treated you well, George, and cherished you like my own? And didn’t I mean to leave you the island, yes, every acre of it? And yet you can turn upon me like this; ay, heap sorrow and degradation upon the head of your benefactor!’

With a plaintive wail, the old man sank again into his chair, while the wind, which had been slowly rising, shrieked fiercely around the house, and a vivid flash of light darting through the pane for a moment brightly illuminated the room. George stood irresolute, with his eyes fixed upon the old man, who sat still, cowering in the chair, with his broad hand tremblingly pressed upon his face. For a moment both remained silent, then George, advancing to his uncle’s chair, said quietly,—

‘Uncle, have you not wronged your child enough that you must continue to do so now? All her life she has been crushed down by you, her father, from whom she should have sought protection. But you shall not continue to commit a crime while I can prevent it. Nina shall no longer be an outcast, for I will bring her to her home!’

Raising his head, Mr Dunroon gazed into his nephew’s face, with a dogged look of triumph.

‘That is beyond you, George,’ he said quietly; ‘the girl is gone!’

‘Gone!’ ejaculated the young man, rising excitedly to his feet.

‘Yes, she is beyond your reach now,’ said Dunroon; ‘she sailed away this very night, and, by God’s help, she will never tread these shores again.’

In a moment George turned almost savagely upon him.

‘What have you done?’ he exclaimed; ‘to what have your passions led you at last? You have sent your child to her death. Do not stand there cursing her when she may be sinking to her doom, but ask God to forgive you for your cruelty and shame.’

As George paused, there was a terrible crash, the wind shrieked more shrilly, and the lightning flashed into his face. Appalled at last, the old man shrank away like a frightened child. Despite his savage refutation of the statement made to him, Mr Dunroon in his heart was credulous of its probable truth. Now he remembered the tender feelings which a glance from Nina's eyes had awakened in his soul, and which, to cover his secret fears, he had attributed to the 'evil eye ;' and, in looking back at the girl's face, he almost seemed to see in her the image of his lost wife. Now he remembered, too, the wild words which Aileen O'Connor had uttered in his ear only that very night, as she stood with the girl on the beach ; how with her bony finger she had pointed to the girl, and exclaimed with savage glee,—

'See how she clings to *me*, while *you* she hates and loathes !'

All now seemed to grow clear. He felt the story was true. The two women had wrought their revenge ; for twenty years he had been desolate, and in the end he had, perhaps, compassed the death of his only child. Frantic and heart-sick, the old man screamed out in pain,—

'George,' he cried, 'be silent. Aileen O'Connor has worked her ruin. I never meant to kill her. Spare me, for God's sake, spare me ! Have I not suffered enough ?'

'And has *she* not suffered, uncle ?' George asked. Promise me now, if she is spared to-night, that you will repair all the wrong you have done her.'

'I promise anything you wish, only leave me in peace,' the old man cried in madness, as, quivering through and through, he turned from his nephew and sank silently into his chair. George left the room and the house, and the door shutting behind him with a crash, locked him out into the storm.

CHAPTER XV.

DAZED and half-stupefied, like one in a half-dream, Nina continued to sit where they had placed her on the deck of the yawl, with her eyes strained in the direction of Cruna Island. The breeze, which had brought them from Cruna, grew less and less, until, when they had left the island some six miles behind them, it entirely died away. The water seemed throbbing as with some hidden trouble, —black, glassy, and direful, it washed against the sides of the vessel with a dreary moan. Overhead the floating masses of black cloud were congregated into one thick mass, which loomed down upon the surface of the sea. The air was full of a mysterious heat, which became almost stifling in its oppressiveness.

For miles and miles away the points of the land loomed clearly visible, the very cattle standing distinct upon the heights, and lowing softly, answering each other, while the sheep were bleating from height to height.

Like a lazy log upon the water lay the yawl, rolled this way that way, by the liquid mountains which rose around her, while in the bow the men stood whispering together amongst themselves, gazing suspiciously at the lowering sky.

Nina still sat silent, while close behind her was Aileen O'Connor, looking stern and forbidding, with her hands crossed, and her bloodless lips compressed. Gazing longingly at the land which they had left, Nina remained motionless. At length, overcome by extreme excitement and fatigue, her eyes closed, her head rested against the bulwark, she passed her arm around the side rigging of the ship, and fell into a half-fainting doze. She had remained thus for some time, when she was suddenly and violently awakened. The vessel gave a tremendous lurch, throwing her forward upon the deck, almost into the sea. In a moment she was caught by one of the sailors and lifted to her feet. She opened her eyes and looked around. To her amazement, it had grown perfectly dark, no single landmark was visible.

The wind, which had risen, whistled shrilly amidst the rigging. With a clatter of feet the men hurried to and fro upon the deck, and the vessel, with all her sails well reefed, was tearing along through a swiftly-rising sea.

Nina looked for her aunt. She was standing in the stern, holding on by a part of the shrouds, her head uncovered, a black shawl drawn tightly around her shoulders, her grey hair blown wildly about her face, and her eyes steadfastly fixed before her.

‘Clear away, mistress, if ’tis not into the sea that you want to go.’

And as the sailor pushed roughly past, Nina scrambled back to her place, and took a firm hold of the rigging.

She was just in time. The yawl gave a great plunge, which sent the men staggering along the deck; and, simultaneously, a huge wave arose, and dashed foaming upon the deck, sweeping all that lay there into the sea.

Drenched now from head to foot, Nina clung still tighter, and watched the darkness of the sea. Black and angry arose the huge waves, crested with boiling surf, which hissed and foamed upon them, and, being caught up by the wind, was scattered in the air like drifting smoke, while the ship plunged headlong into the ocean, now rising, suspended in the air, then plunging down, lost for a moment in a mass of sea smoke and hissing foam.

Above, the heavens loomed threateningly. Thick black masses of cloud, rudely rent asunder by the rising wind, were shot swiftly across the sky, while in the west, vivid rays of light played momentarily, cutting up the clouds and flashing down upon the sea; the thunder crashed and roared overhead.

Around was darkness impenetrable, shutting out the land, veiling all save the flashing foam which flew about the ship. At the wheel the steersman stood, buttoned to the throat, with his shiny cap pulled low over his anxious eyes.

‘Where are we?’ asked Nina. But before the man could reply there was a sudden rush.

‘Lower the peak!’ cried a voice, and no sooner was

the order obeyed than a wild gust struck the vessel, tearing fiercely at the dripping sail as if to rend it into shreds, while the water washed in a stream about the deck. There was a crash. As the gust lessened in violence the ship righted herself, quivering from stem to stern, and one or two rope-ends dangled in the air.

'Three blocks gone; ease her up, or we'll lose every stitch.'

'Can't you make out her bearings, skipper?' asked the steersman.

'No; keep her a-head; I fancy we're in the open.' The skipper disappeared, while the steersman muttered,—

'Why the devil did he come out on this h— of a coast without a compass? Who on earth could see through that blackness? Saugh!' as a wave curled above him and washed him from head to foot; 'the storm's growing. Maybe the ——— witches mean to drown us; anyhow, we stand a poor chance of reaching land this night.'

Every moment the wind increased; wildly it shrieked around the vessel, fiercely it tore at the fragments of dripping sail, while with almost bare poles, dripping as she arose from the waves, the yawl plunged on. Throughout all this tumult, still holding on by the side rigging of the ship, the old woman kept her place. Again and again the waves arose and dashed about her, drenching her from head to foot, and almost sweeping her into the sea. Her hands were bruised with clinging, her grey hair was blown about by the wind, and her cheeks were cut by the blinding sea scum which was ever dashed rudely into her face. The shrieking wind was bitter, the water was almost frozen upon the deck, but Aileen O'Connor seemed indifferent to the elements; her face was set, her lack-lustre eyes retained their hard, cold look; yet ever as they fell upon Nina, who, drenched and shivering, clung wildly to the vessel's side, the hard, cold gleam of the face softened, as her bloodless lips muttered,—

'*He* did it!—*he* did it!'

Suddenly a vivid flash of light illuminated the whole

ocean. It seemed that the heavens had been torn apart, and, blazing with lurid light, fallen down upon the sea. Almost simultaneously there was a tremendous crash; the vessel trembled from stem to stern, quivered like a frightened thing, and again plunged onward. The seamen shrieked. Nina covered her eyes with her hand, and when she looked again all had become dark. The skipper stood calling loudly to his men. On the deck splinters of wood and sail lay scattered, while several men were employed in cutting the wreck away. The mizen-mast had been shivered to splinters by the lightning flash, and one man, struck to death, washed from the deck into the sea.

Bereft now of mizen-mast, and scarcely a shred of sail left upon her pole, the vessel laboured on, though the violence of the storm seemed slowly to increase. Nina, growing sick with fear, clung tighter to the bulwarks; while the waves swept over her again and again. Eagerly she tried to penetrate the darkness, and catch a glimpse of the faces of the sailors in vain. Again and again she asked some question, but received no reply. The men rushed here and there, clinging to the ropes as they went, heedless of all save the growing peril. Quivering through and through, drenched from mast to stern, the great yawl tossed like a toy upon the waves. For a moment she was suspended high in the air, on the crest of a breaking wave; then, with a deafening crash, she plunged down as if into the very depths of the ocean. Simultaneously there was a cry, a rush, a roar of breaking waves, and a heavy surging sound, and above the din arose the voice of the skipper,—

‘Man the pumps!’

Instantly some of the sailors rushed to obey the command; while others remained to tear down the last remaining shred of sail.

‘She’s sinking!’ cried one of the men; ‘we had better leave her and take to the boat?’

‘Ghost of a chance you’d have in the boat in this sea! Keep to the pumps; maybe we’ll save her.’

‘Never; the water’s knee-deep in the hold—’

The rest was lost. A shrieking squall swept down upon the ship, burying her side in the sea; a wave broke directly above her, and fell with a roar upon her deck, then poured again into the ocean. Tremblingly the vessel righted herself, and the skipper, with the water running off him in a stream, turned again to the helmsman. He was gone, swept away into the sea, and the ship was drifting helplessly upon the waves. Another man sprang to his place, but too late. Beaten about like a cork upon the ocean, utterly unmanageable, with a stream of water pouring into her hold, the vessel drifted on to destruction. The skipper crept anxiously along the deck, and sought his men, and at his approach there was a cry,—

‘She’s foundering!—the water’s rising; we cannot keep her afloat much longer.’

‘Lower the boat!’ the skipper cried hastily; ‘’tis our only chance.’

The pumps were at once deserted, and there was a rush on deck while the boat was being lowered into the sea.

Up to this Nina had remained silent, dreading to speak, afraid to move, lest a wave should suddenly break above her and sweep her from the deck. But when she saw the crew about to desert the vessel, the dread of being overlooked and left there to die overcame all her other fears, and cautiously leaving her place, she seized the arm of a sailor who was hurrying by—

‘Wait,’ she said; ‘for heaven’s sake help me to get my aunt over yonder to the boat!’

The man roughly shook her away.

‘Hold off, mistress; the old witch must take her chance. Every man for himself.’

He rushed past her on to the other side of the vessel, and disappeared over into the boat. The girl crept back to where her aunt stood, took her round the waist, and said hurriedly,—

‘Come, Aunt Aileen, quick, before another wave breaks, or we shall be left!’

Strengthened in her excitement, she dragged the old

woman along the deck to the spot where the boat was lowered. All the crew had descended; the boat was about to push off, and the skipper, who alone stood on the deck, was preparing to leap in, when Nina relinquished her aunt and seized him, forcibly holding him back.

‘Let us come first,’ she cried; ‘hand my aunt down.’

The man turned.

‘There’s no room there,’ he said; ‘the boat’s full enough, and I must look to my crew.’

‘Oh, never leave us, never leave us here!’ Nina cried, holding him tightly by the arm, but he roughly pushed her away.

‘Ghost of a chance we’d have with the pair of *you* on board: we must look to ourselves, I tell you;’ and, as if to quiet his own conscience qualms, he mentally added, ‘maybe, after all, the folks were right, and, if they’re a couple of witches, they’d surely work us more harm; better leave them where they are.’

In a moment he leapt over the side into the boat, and loudly commanded the men to push off.

Frantic with terror, Nina screamed aloud,—

‘Come back! take my aunt; only take her, and I will stay. Have pity, for God’s sake, have pity!’

Her prayers were lost. Heedless of all save their own safety, the men pulled away into the breaking waves; one moment more, and they were lost to view, while speechless, terror-stricken, and sick, Nina and Aileen O’Connor stood alone on the deck of the foundering vessel.

For a moment the girl stood gazing with terrified eyes at the spot where the boat had disappeared, then, seeing that her only hope had gone, she turned, and without a word, crouched down on the deck beside her aunt. Silent, speechless, motionless, the old woman sat upon the drenching boards, her gaunt figure drawn up straight, and her lack-lustre eyes fixed vacantly upon the sea.

Seemingly impenetrable to all outward sensations, she sat like a figure of stone, but when the girl crouched down beside her, she turned her head, and almost in-

instinctively her bony arm was reached forth, and clasped around Nina's neck. Never before, in the whole course of her life, had Nina felt that hard hand rest so gently upon her, never before had she received one sign of affection from the stern woman whom she called her aunt.

Always sullen and bitter, the woman had ever repelled any outward show of love in the child, who, from her infancy, had lived under strict restraint, uncared for, and with none but the gloomy woman for whom to care.

When Nina felt the hard hand pressed so softly around her neck, her excitement was wrought to its fullest pitch. Claspings her arms around her aunt's waist, she burst into hysterical tears.

'Oh aunt, dear Aunt Aileen,' she cried, 'it was cruel of them to leave you here; why did they not take you, and leave me here alone?'

Immediately the old woman withdrew her arm, and broke out in her wonted querulous tones.

'Why should they take me? Isn't it as well for an old woman like me to die?' Then, as Nina remained silent, she continued, in a more excited tone. 'Why should you blame them, when they are not to blame? Would they have brought us out here? Would they have exiled us from Cruna? 'Tis no fault of theirs that we die, but of him, and him alone, who placed us in their hands!'

'He was cruel, too,' said Nina softly; 'he is a bad man, but maybe he never thought of this; he could not foresee the storm.'

'Could he not?' cried the old woman fiercely; 'but I tell you he could, Nina. 'Twas what he meant, for us to die together. He has worked it out at last, he has brought vengeance upon himself, if he only knew!'

'Aunt Aileen,' cried the girl.

The old woman started, drew up her gaunt figure to its full height, grasped the rigging with one hand, and with the other pointed to the flashing sky.

'If I called God's vengeance upon him!' she cried, 'if God's wrath descended upon his head, he could not be more crushed down than he is; and who has done this,

but I, Aileen O'Connor, the girl whom he ruined, the girl whom he hunted from his dominions, and cast away, with an old man, to starve in the southern land! Ay!' she continued, half muttering to herself, 'little good has come to him; God's curse has followed him; and now this is the end.'

Nina clasped her arms still tighter around the old woman's waist, as she cried, 'Aunt, dear Aunt Aileen, speak to me, kiss me once, only once; the vessel is sinking, we have not long to live!'

Turning her dreary face towards the girl, the old woman looked steadfastly into her eyes.

'We shall die,' she said, in her solemn, querulous voice. 'Yes, we shall die together. Did I not say so? The child follows the old woman, and shares the same fate. Did I not tell him so, Nina?'

Trembling and terror-stricken, Nina stood before the gaunt form. The vacant eyes looked wild and wandering, the pale grey face gleamed ghastly.

As she looked upon the figure and listened to the wild wandering words, Nina felt afraid, for she thought, 'The fear of death is maddening her, she does not know what she says,' and as the girl glanced at the breaking waves, felt the piercing wind, saw the impenetrable darkness gather thicker around her, and the sky flash down, as it were, upon her head, she cried,—

'It was cruel to send her here, cruel, cruel!' Then stretching forth her arms, she added,—'Aunt Aileen, never talk like that; try to forgive him now as I do.'

'You, child; what have you to forgive? Every sorrow that he heaped upon you will return like a fire-brand to burn him; little did he know what he did when he turned *you* away.'

'Oh! what do you mean?' cried Nina, still clinging to her aunt. 'If there is some secret, tell me now, Aunt Aileen, before we die.'

'Tell you? Yes, I will tell you, though I know you will turn from me, and hate me for it. But I am not solely to blame; 'tis through him I have injured you. I never meant you harm, Nina; all I wanted was to be re-

vengeed on him. My heart was full of hatred to the last. For it I sacrificed your life, and now, I have wrought your death.'

White and terrified Nina listened in wonder.

'What does it all mean? Aunt Aileen, tell me the truth!' she cried; but ere the old woman could reply, the yawl plunged down, buried in the water, then, rising again, suspended in the air on the crest of a wave, she descended again with a crash that shook her through. The waves arose and washed about her, but she remained split in twain, firmly fixed on unseen rocks, her stern raised in the air, and her bow plunged forward.

It seemed that in one moment more the hull of the ship would divide and sink beneath the waves. In the stern, the girl and the old woman sat hand-in-hand, as with wild eyes and pale face, Nina looked at the splitting planks of the vessel.

Presently she spoke.

'Aunt Aileen!'

The querulous voice replied sharply,—

'Why should you call me aunt? You are no kin of mine; *he* is your father!'

'*He!* whom?' asked Nina, starting to her feet.

'He who sent you here—he who shunned you, and cursed you for a witch; the master of Cruna.'

Nina stood gazing into the old woman's face in awe and wonder, while softly beneath her breath, and with clay-cold lips, she repeated,—

'*He! my father!*'

'Yes,' repeated the old woman, as some of the old wicked light gleamed again in her eyes. 'He is your father, Nina—you are nothing to me; body and soul, you belong to *him*. How bravely he cursed his daughter, did he not, his only child?' then looking at the girl who still stood motionless as marble, she continued,—

'Turn from me, Nina, curse me now as I deserve, and make me feel that I am alone. You are *his* child; flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone. Oh, Nina, how I hated you when I thought of this; how my heart turned against you. I almost believed you were like him. I was hard

and unkind when I looked into your pretty face and knew you belonged to *him*; and I kept you, I clutched you tighter, to keep you from him, when I thought how happy he would be if he knew. Nina, I did this—I have wronged you—made you an instrument to my revenge; now turn from me, curse me as I deserve, and let me die!’

As the old woman paused, the girl threw up her arms and clasped them around the withered neck.

‘O God! why did I not die before you told me this?’ she cried. ‘Aunt, dearest aunt, come closer—whisper—tell me it is not true!’

‘It *is* true, Nina,’ the old woman replied. ‘Why do you cling to me like this?’

‘Because I love you,’ the girl replied. ‘Dear Aunt Aileen, I have always loved you, but I cannot care for that man. Think of that—think of all that has passed, and pity me. O God, have pity! Aunt, do not turn away; kiss me now, and say you love me too!’

A new light filled the old woman’s eyes; the grim expression of the face grew softer, and the hard lines about the mouth more gentle as Aileen looked down at the clinging form. For a moment she stood irresolute, then, trembling like a leaf, she bent her head, put her arms around the girl’s neck, and kissed her lips.

‘I do love you,’ she murmured, ‘though God knows I never thought to love *his* child. God forgive me, God forgive me!’

Ardently Nina returned the cold caress, then with her arms about the old woman’s neck she cried,—

‘Dear Aunt Aileen, pray God to forgive them all, and—’

Suddenly the vessel gave a great lurch. Nina caught the rigging; Aileen O’Connor was cast flat upon the deck. There was a roar of breaking waves; the hull of the ship was split in two. Heeling forward, the fore part was soon buried in the foam, and that upon which Nina stood shook and trembled, and seemed to be heeling over into the waves.

With a face-pale as death Nina looked at the intruding

sea ; then she closed her eyes and fell upon her knees, clasping her arms around the old woman's neck with passionate sobs. Above the waves broke, and around the sea washed, with a never-ceasing roar, while on the deck, covered with blinding foam, the two figures lay locked in a last embrace.

CHAPTER XVI.

WITH dawn came calm. On the shore of Cruna Island the waters washed with dreary murmurs, while the peaks of the dripping crags which overhung the sea were enshrouded in a thick white mist, which loomed over the surface of the ocean, utterly concealing every object from view. Throughout the night, George Dunroon had wandered on the shore like a restless spirit, but no sooner did the dawn begin to break than he rowed out to the cutter which, on the previous night, had brought him home, and began making hasty preparations to set out in search of Nina. On the top of the Creag-na-Ghoill, which commanded a view of the surrounding ocean, a crowd of islanders were collected, while others stood on the shore, studying the movements of the young master, and uttering various commentaries upon his actions.

'What's the good of it, at all, at all?' said one; 'sure the colleen's safe enough. That captain wasn't one to weather a storm, but he'd just run the yawl into Storport harbour, and keep her safe till morning.'

'Into Storport, is it?' returned another; 'how could he do that, and the wind blowing due north-west? No, no, she's either run south before the wind or foundered in open water.'

Suddenly there was a cry from the crowd on the top of the crag, and a dozen fingers were pointed seaward. For a moment the mist had scattered, and had disclosed to their view a momentary glimpse of some dark mass

looming far out on the sea. George was at once summoned, but ere he had reached the spot the mist had again condensed, and again hung heavy over the waters. As the dawn advanced, it seemed to grow more dense, although here and there it became scattered like sea-smoke. Suddenly, however, the whole mass began to stir, and in one thick cloud it slowly lifted like a curtain from the sea. As it ascended, the surface of the ocean became clearly visible, and all now saw distinctly a huge black mass fixed between the sharp teeth of a reef of rocks, which arose black and jagged several miles from the shore. As George looked, his head turned dizzy, his heart stood still with anticipation.

The hull of a small vessel of some sort was split in twain on the rocks, the bow being plunged forward in the waves, and the stern raised in the air.

George turned to the crowd.

‘You think it’s the yawl?’ he asked, in a low voice.

‘It looks like her, sir.’

‘Get the boat,’ replied George; ‘we’ll row out.’

‘Sure, ’tis no use, yer honor; there’s no living soul aboard that wreck!’

‘Get the boat,’ commanded George again, ‘before it is too late!’

Without another word the islanders ran forward to launch the skiff, while George followed them, glancing continually seaward. The prediction of the people seemed correct; no living soul appeared on board the wreck; nothing was visible but the black hull itself. George’s heart sank, but he did not despair. Nina might be below, he thought; she might be in some corner of the vessel hidden from his sight. Impatiently he urged on the men, as, sitting in the stern of the skiff, he directed her course towards the reef.

As the boat left the shore and drew nearer the rocks, George, still watching the wreck, thought he could distinguish a figure on the deck. As he approached closer, however, his view of the deck was cut off, the stern of the yawl having heeled over, and her broadside being presented to the surf. The sea was calm; but near the

rocks the water was sucked up and cast back so violently that approach was perilous. Keeping a distance from the crag, the men pulled cautiously round, and were about to cling on to the wreck when there was a sudden tumult and a cry,—

‘ Pull for your lives ! ’

The skiff had darted only a short distance from the wreck when the yawl separated. The fore part, plunging entirely forward, sank beneath the water. The stern quivered, and seemed about to follow. George rose, prepared to jump overboard, when he was forcibly retained in his seat, and the skiff once more pulled towards the wreck. Pausing beneath the stern, one of the men threw up a grapnel ; and George, divested of boots and coat, seized the rope, and before he could be stopped, was swinging in the air, ascending the rope which hung from the vessel.

A minute after, he stood on the deck of the yawl. There he paused, gazing upon a sight which froze the blood in his veins. Lying flat on the deck, her black clothes drenched and clinging feebly about her form, and her grey hair scattered like drift-weed around her, was Aileen O’Connor, stone dead ! Sitting close beside this figure, with her eyes fixed vacantly upon the ghastly face, was another—living. Drenched too from head to foot—her face pale as that of the corpse beside her, her long hair hanging about her shoulders ; one hand, bruised and bleeding, supported her chin ; the other hung listlessly by her side. She sat motionless, like one in a total trance. For a moment George stood chained to the spot, gazing in speechless agony at the figures ; then he walked forward, fell upon his knees, and clasped Nina passionately in his arms. The girl did not speak nor start ; but quietly raising her eyes, she looked into his face with a vacant, bewildered stare.

One by one the islanders clambered upon the deck, and stood looking upon the scene, and into their faces Nina glanced with the same vacant look in her eyes. Lifting the corpse of Aileen O’Connor, they conveyed it to the skiff, and quietly and unresistingly Nina followed.

When the boat reached land the girl stood on the shore like one in a dream ; but George put his arm around her and led her home.

For many weeks after that day the girl lay raving in fever, hovering on the brink of death. Anxiously George watched in the sick-room ; while Mr Dunroon, with bowed head and gloomy countenance, walked the house in sullen silence. After prolonged suffering, Nina gradually began to improve ; and as she slowly regained her health, the vacant look which had haunted George began to fade from her eyes, and a more intelligent light illuminated them, until, at last, she fully recovered the reason which she had temporarily lost. The expression of her face was sadder than it had been ; her voice was gentle and very tender. The awful anguish which she had endured had left its mark.

For a time she was utterly unable to shake off the morbid depression which weighed upon her. George was most constant in his attentions, and, as Nina gradually improved under his care, he at length pressed her to fulfil the promise which she had made to him long before. After much hesitation, Nina consented. The two were married, and forthwith took up their abode in the gloomy dwelling of the Master of Cruna.

True to his promise, Mr Dunroon recognised Nina as his daughter, though he never exhibited towards her a father's affection, but submitted in sullen silence to his fate. Yet Nina's friendliness gradually gained some influence over his hard nature, and he began to grow more gentle in his bearing as years went by.

After it had been conveyed to the land, and received the sacred rites of the Church, the body of the old woman was buried near the sands of the surging sea. The grass grows green above her, the sea-smoke dashes over her head, and the stone upon which, during life, she had been wont to gaze, at length marks the last resting-place of

AILEEN O'CONNOR.

CHAPTER XVII.

As I finished the story, the book fell upon my knee, and my eyes rested sadly upon the dying fire.

I had been strangely interested, for the characters were so faintly disguised, that, after the first few pages, I had had little difficulty in recognising them; I understood now the meaning of that light which had so puzzled me as I gazed into my hostess's sorrowful face; I understood now the look of intense pain which had crossed her countenance when I lightly spoke of witchcraft; and the interest which I already felt for this beautiful creature and her husband increased tenfold.

I got little sleep that night, and, shortly after daybreak, I rose, weary with courting slumber.

I was the first to descend the stairs, so I quietly let myself out of the house, and went for a stroll towards the sea.

Some time later, as I was returning to the house, I met Nora.

'Have you read the story?' she asked.

'Yes.'

'Well, then, I needn't tell you to be careful not to talk about witchcraft again. It's twenty years since all that happened, and yet Nina feels as strongly about it as ever, I think. . . . Do you see that graveyard on the hillside? old Mr Dunroon is buried there; and if you will come with me, I'll show you the old woman's tomb.'

We walked away, and soon came to it,—a quaintly-fashioned tombstone set in the earth close to the sea. On it was traced, in letters which were fast wearing away,—

AILEEN O'CONNOR,

DROWNED AT SEA ON THE 30TH DAY OF JANUARY 18—

May She rest in Peace.

The stone was in good order, and evidently tended by careful hands.

‘Nina hadn’t much cause to love her,’ said Nora; ‘but you see she cares for her even after so many years.’

We turned to retrace our steps towards the house; presently Nora paused again, and drew my attention to a heap of stones.

‘That is where the hut stood,’ she said, ‘the hut that poor Nina saw burnt to the ground while she was being driven out to sea,—it is the memory of that time which makes them determined to live here to improve the people, and to prevent the repetition of such a scene.’

We stayed several days on Cruna Island, the guests of the master and his wife. We fished his rivers, shot over his land, and altogether managed to get some of the best sport we had had for months. But at last the visit terminated, and the day of our departure really arrived.

In our little craft was stowed away most of the game, and a couple of the salmon we had killed, and which they insisted upon our taking.

Kathleen was loaded with presents for the girls who had remained at home, while I had been forced to accept one of Dunroon’s most valuable dogs. Altogether the leave-taking was affecting, and we were overwhelmed with invitations to come again.

We had intended to leave pretty early, but the leave-taking and the gathering together of the presents had so delayed us, that ere we finally pushed off, and took a last farewell of Cruna, the day was well-nigh spent.

There was a fair breeze blowing, so we put up the sail, and the *Ariel*, bending slightly to one side, sped onward like a bird. We looked back, my uncle and I waved our hats, the girls their handkerchiefs, for there, on the beach, stood Dunroon and his wife; they had accompanied us down to the beach, and they now stood watching our boat as it sped out to sea.

We sailed right across, but when we reached the other side the sail had to come down, and the men took to their oars again. By this time it was twilight. The silence of night had fallen on land and sea; the wild cry of the sea-birds rang with strange echoes through

the night. The lofty cliffs, magnified by the dim light, towered up above the glassy waters, which washed unceasingly about their feet, while the heavens were sparkling in all their starry radiance. Ever and anon, as we glided by the crags, we were startled by a great flutter of wings, and some frightened sea-bird, awakened from its slumbers by the splashing of the oars, passed so close to me, that his wings almost brushed my cheek, and his shrill cries resounded with strange echoes through the night, as he faded slowly away.

When we leapt on to the shore at Storport it was quite dark; we were rather tired, and anxious to get back to the cosy comfort of the Lodge. We were soon ready to depart; my uncle had given his instructions to the boatmen, and I had managed to get possession of Oona's hand, when suddenly we were arrested.

Kathleen was accosted by an old man, who implored her to go with him to see his daughter, who was sick. Kathleen must go at once, or the woman might die before she could reach the house.

Kathleen did not hesitate—she was well used to such demands. She paused for a moment, to give some instructions to Nora and Oona, then she turned to follow the man alone.

This I would not permit. In spite of her protestations, I insisted upon accompanying her; so, after impressing upon the girls to be sure and have a substantial meal ready for us when we got back, we walked off together in the old man's wake.

We followed him for about a mile over the hills, stumbling through the darkness, and tumbling in and out of miserable bog-holes, until we stood before a low thatched hut, surrounded with filth.

When we entered, the smoke was so thick that I could see nothing, but I heard the grunting of pigs, the babbling of old hags, and the moans of the sick woman, and next I was startled by the lowing of a cow, which was standing close to my side. The smell which met us was so offensive that I saw Kathleen pause and turn, as if about to rush again into the open air; but remem-

bering, doubtless, the poor woman who was lying helplessly there, and to whom she might be of some service, she strengthened up her failing spirit, and took her stand. By-and-by the smoke cleared, and we could distinctly see all the objects in the room.

In a corner stood a dilapidated four-post bedstead, which, to my astonishment, was unoccupied; but on the floor, before the fire, was strewn a little straw, and upon that lay the sick woman, looking pale as death, and uttering feeble moans. Around her squatted the hags, some on the floor, some on benches, and one was actually sitting upon the upturned black cauldron. They were most of them smoking, some were profusely weeping, and all were waiting for the sufferer to die, without lifting a finger either to try and save her or to alleviate her sufferings in any way. At the time this amazed me, but I have since learned that it is the true Connaught mode. When a woman is taken ill, she does not say 'Send for the doctor,' or ask for help; her exclamation is, 'I'm done—send for the priest,' and she tries to compose herself for death. Sometimes, by a miracle, she recovers, but more frequently she dies.

Behind the invalid stood a group of men, commenting in audible whispers upon her ghastly look, and the certainty of her death; all of which remarks were followed by feeble moans from the sufferer.

When Kathleen approached, the woman raised her eyes, and fixed them pitifully upon her face, and the women, with a wild gabble of Irish, which I supposed must be words of welcome, made way for her. She bent over the sufferer, then I saw her rise and draw back, the smell was so great as to be too much even for her. The rags with which the sufferer was clothed, and the rags which were thrown over her, were positively decayed with filth.

Kathleen spoke rapidly to the men in Irish, and they shuffled out of the house; after a deal of rapid talking, she induced half the crowd of old women to follow them; then she turned to me.

'Jack,' she said, 'do you still persist in waiting for

me? If so, I must get you either to step into a little room over there, where the horse is stabled, or wait outside. I must make them wash the poor creature, and put her into bed, before I can do anything; the stench is frightful.'

I again expressed my determination to wait for her, and elected to do so in the open air. I took a cigar from my pocket, lit it with a burning sod from the hearth, and stepped at once outside the cabin.

As I walked up and down in the darkness, I could not help thinking of my cousin, and the kind of life which she had set herself to lead. I could not but admire Kathleen, for I knew what she had to endure. The cause of half the diseases in the village, was the dirt and filth in which the people lived. Soap and water and clean linen were Kathleen's principal remedies, and in most cases they were marvellously successful.

The ignorance of the people is pitiful; more than half the population of the village are unable to read a single sentence or form a letter. But they do not regret. They are not ambitious; they are content to live as their fathers did before them,—to cut and gather turf, and to cultivate a small piece of ground which is rented with each hut. The spirit of enterprise never once rises in their dull and listless dispositions. They plod through their lives without the slightest variation or enlightenment, and they quietly fall to sleep, leaving their children to pursue the same course after them.

Yet, with all their faults, they are very generous and kind-hearted. The stranger is ever made welcome to their hearth and board, and if they receive a kindness, however slight, they always endeavour to make ample return.

The only little bit of deception in which they indulge is the making of *Potheen*, or mountain-dew. Although there is in the village a barrack full of military-looking policemen, and despite the fact that several illicit stills are yearly found and seized, and their owners compelled to pay the heavy fine of six pounds, the authorities have not been able to stop the sale or manufacture of this

contraband article. But the fluid is not *traded* in to any great extent; it is made principally for home use, to keep out the cold in the winter time, when the snow is thickly covering the frozen ground, and the cold, north wind is blowing in from the storm-tossed sea. Poor, half-frozen creatures! what would life be worth to them without this one comfort? It is the delight, the excitement, and the only one luxury of their lives. A solitary people in a solitary waste, living with their pigs and cattle in wretched little mud-huts, their only clothing a few dirty rags, and their only food potatoes; who could deny them this?

My reflections were brought to an end by the sudden appearance of a cauliagh, who invited me to re-enter the cabin. I did so, and found matters considerably improved. The sick woman, clean and comfortably clothed, was lying now upon the bed in a calm sleep. Kathleen, looking flushed and somewhat tired, was fastening on her cloak. All her thoughts, as usual, were for some one else.

‘You must be tired, Jack,’ she said; ‘have a glass of something before we start,—there’s plenty of potheen, and milk too in the house;’ and the old man who had brought us thither added his entreaties, but I refused. In truth, I was anxious that Kathleen should get back. She turned to the old man again,—

‘Follow us down as soon as you like,’ she said; ‘I shall prepare your basket as soon as I get home.’ Then she took my arm, and we departed.

When we reached the Lodge a very different picture awaited us. In the dining-room a bright fire filled the grate, and about a dozen candles were burning. My uncle was in his easy-chair, quietly enjoying his pipe, and watching Amy, who, kneeling on the hearth, was trying to make Nero give my dog a welcome. Oona, clad again in her favourite white, was seated at the piano, playing some tender Irish airs; while Nora, with the others kneeling before her, was exhibiting the presents which had been sent by the mistress of Cruna. The table was spread for a good dinner.

The girls welcomed us with a cry of delight, for two of them, at least, were hungry, and eager to begin. But, although Kathleen was tired to death, her first care was to prepare the basket of necessaries which she had promised to send up to the sick woman.

This done, we were at liberty to enjoy ourselves.

Our meal over, I lit my cigar, and some of us strolled to the kitchen to have a chat with the men, who we believed must by this time have finished their meal, and be enjoying their pipes by the fire. Our imaginary picture had been partly right, but it remained for our eyes to complete it. The men had finished their meal, lit up their pipes, and were seated around the fire; but their eyes were fixed with strange intensity upon a figure—no other, indeed, than Conolly, who, paper in hand, was reading, with an evident sense of enjoyment, an account of a double murder which had recently been committed. He was greatly excited, for his hands and voice both trembled, as he exclaimed in conclusion,—

‘They both fell dead—stone dead—and I say, more power to the hand that done it!’

‘Conolly, you blackguard!’ shouted my uncle, who stood at the kitchen door, ‘put that paper in the fire!’

He dropped the paper and looked up, and I saw at once that something was wrong. He had been drinking. There was a wandering light in his eyes, his jaw was set; and instead of the usual smile of infantine mildness, his face wore a look of sullen and fixed resolve. Was this Conolly? I could hardly believe it—the change was so complete.

‘Do you hear what I say, Conolly?’ repeated my uncle; ‘put that paper in the fire!’

‘What way, yer honor?’ answered the man, still grasping the paper firmly in his hand; ‘what harm can the paper do entirely?’

‘Not much of itself, but a good deal if left with you. Listen to me, Conolly. I won’t have you coming here and corrupting the boys and girls with your lawless talk and lawless ways. I won’t have you read to them all

the accounts of these crimes, which are a disgrace to Ireland.'

'A disgrace to Ireland,' said Conolly quietly; 'sure, yer honor, them's not the only crimes that's a disgrace to the land!'

'What do you mean?'

'Just this, sor,' continued Conolly, who was growing more and more excited, 'there be murders and murders. All the world knows that for years the poor Irishman has been crushed like a beast beneath the cruel foot of the landlord—he's had to feel the pinch of starvation, and see his children die all round him for lack of food; he's had to be turned out of the house that has sheltered him since he was born, and maybe to die in the ditch like a dog. Well, the world says nothing to all this; but when some poor devil, in self-defence, strikes at the tyrant that has been crushing him into his grave, the world calls out and says it's murder, and thirsts for the poor cratur's blood.'

'And so it is murder!' said my uncle.

'You think so, yer honor? Well, I don't. I call it *justice*; and when I hear that another tyrant is down, I say, "Praise be to God, more power to the hand that done it!"'

'More shame for you. If a man won't pay his rent he ought to be turned out.'

'Sure 'tisin't always that he won't; sometimes he can't, said Conolly; 'and as to the turning out, yer honor didn't say the likes o' that when Mr O'Neil—God blasht his soul!—turned me out of house and home that winter when I was down with the fever. He refused to give me bite or sup, and told me if I didn't choose to go to the workhouse I might die in the road; but 'twas yer honor that took me in, and gave me work, and kept me from committing murder. I don't forget the man that took me in any more than I forget the one that turned me out.'

The speaker was very much excited; his eyes glared and his hands clenched, and, for the first time in his life perhaps, he looked really capable of bloodshed. My

uncle evidently saw this, for he turned the conversation to other themes.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I’m too tired to discuss these questions to-night, Conolly; besides, I didn’t come to the kitchen for that, but to ask you if you could manage to sleep here to-night?’

‘Is it to-night, yer honor?’ said Conolly quietly, and looking decidedly uncomfortable. He evidently didn’t like to refuse my uncle, and yet we could see he had made other plans. My uncle seeing this, grew firmer in his resolve.

‘It’s the first favour you’ve ever done me, and maybe it’ll be the last. Will ye sleep here to-night or not, Conolly? Yes or no?’

After a good deal of hesitation, Conolly consented to remain. Then my uncle added carelessly,—

‘By the way, Conolly, will ye lend me the paper a bit? I should like to read the news.’

And Conolly having reluctantly handed it over, we returned to the dining-room to smoke our last pipe before going to bed.

‘I’m afraid,’ he said, ‘poor Conolly will get himself into trouble some day. Whenever he gets a drop of drink it’s the old cry—down with tyrants in general, and one tyrant in particular. I wouldn’t have given much for O’Neil’s life if he’d met Conolly on a dark road to-night.’

CHAPTER XVIII.

‘MUSHA, but this is a bad way we’re in, yer honor,’ said Shawn, as he wiped the rain from his blinded eyes, and tried in vain to penetrate the darkness which lay like a cloud around us.

I shivered as he spoke, and silently acknowledged the truth of his words.

We were in a bad way indeed.

For several hours that evening we had lain damp and chilly on the banks of a lonely lake, waiting for the wild geese; having secured several victims, we gathered up our belongings, and prepared for a walk over several miles of dreary bogland towards home. But we had scarcely covered a mile of the ground, and were in the most desolate part of the mountain, when the darkness, which for some time had been gradually coming on, fell like a pall around us; a bitter wind swept lightly over the moor, and rain began to fall. Still we wandered on; at length Shawn paused, declared, with a tone of shame in his voice, that he had lost his way, and asked what was to be done.

What *could* be done?

We were surrounded by black darkness, fully seven miles from home. We had lost our way, and had no means of regaining it. It seemed to me that the only feasible plan was to remain where we were till dawn.

We had just come to this despairing decision, and were about to make the most of our boggy bed, when there was borne to us out of the darkness, on the breath of the wind, the faint echo of a human voice. Never before had a voice sounded to me so pleasant. Darting forward, I was about to hail the stranger when the more prudent Shawn held me back.

‘Don’t spake, yer honor,’ said he; ‘’tis that thief o’ the world Mick Maloney, and if he hears *your* voice he’ll surely take us for the peelers.’

So we kept perfectly still, while the unconscious stranger approached.

As he drew near we heard that he was singing softly next we distinguished the words of the song.

‘ Send it gaily round,
Life would be no pleasure,
If we had not found
This enchanting treasure.
And, when tyrant death’s
Arrow shall transfix ye,
Let your latest breaths
Be whisky, whisky, whisky.

‘Wid all the pleasure in the world,’ said Shawn, bringing the song to an end, the singer to a standstill. ‘And now, Mick Maloney,’ he continued, ‘thank the good God above that we’re not the peelers, but only two poor cratures that’s lost our way.’

‘What ! Shawn !’ came in stentorian tones from the darkness.

‘Yes, in troth, it’s Shawn, and the young mashter along wid him, and both just as wet as can be. We’re seekin’ a night’s lodging, Mick Maloney, for we can’t get home, and the bog’s but a wet bed at the best o’ times, and no way fit for the likes o’ us.’

Who Mick Maloney might be I had not at that time the most remote idea. I only felt that he came like an angel of goodness that night, for, after a short whispered conversation with Shawn, he agreed to lead us to a haven of rest. So we gathered up our traps again, with a much lighter heart than we had lain them down, and followed the footsteps of our guide.

How far we really went, I never could discover, but at the time the distance seemed to me interminable. The night was so dark that I could not see one foot before me, and I stepped recklessly on, tumbling in and out of bogholes, while the wind blew clammily on my cheek, and the rain fell, soaking my garments through. At length our guide paused, and I saw that we stood before the closed door of a mud cabin. The hut looked black and desolate as the scene surrounding it, and I thought at first that it was quite deserted, but on Mick Maloney applying his knuckles to the door, and giving three peculiar taps, a faint whistle came through the keyhole ; then, with the words, ‘All right,’ spoken in Irish, the door flew open, I was hurriedly hustled in, and it closed again.

The transfer from black darkness to bright light was so sudden that for a moment my eyes were blinded, and I could see nothing, but I heard around me a hissing of steam and a splashing of water, which told me where I was.

Our guide had led us to a still-house.

Yes : when at length I removed my hand from my blinded eyes, I saw that my supposition was correct. There, a yard or two from my very feet, stood two illicit stills in the height of distillation ; some half-dozen stalwart fellows were working them, while a couple of young girls, an old woman, and a man were filling stone jars with potheen. The sight of this labour was anything but pleasant to me. I knew that if, by any stroke of ill luck, the police should happen to pass by that house that night, come in when the work was proceeding, and find me coolly looking on, I should be summoned before the magistrate, and ordered to pay a heavy fine. Yet what was I to do ? Stay in the warmth and shelter, or return to the cold, wet, desolate bog ? I decided to adopt the former plan, so having thrown off my dripping overcoat, and taken a good drink of the whisky which was so liberally bestowed upon me, I lit my cigar, and taking a seat beside the fire, looked leisurely at what was going on. Shawn threw down a little straw for the dogs, put my gun in a place of safety, hung up the birds, and then went over to the boys to give them a hand with their work.

Fully an hour passed thus : both the stills were empty, and the last jar was being corked, when we were suddenly startled by a peculiar scraping and whining at the door. Shawn flew to open it ; as he did so, a dog crept in.

‘Patrick,’ cried one of the girls, addressing the drenched animal, ‘is it the peelers, dear ?’

The poor brute set up a yell as if in answer, and seizing one of the stills with his teeth, tried hard to pull it along the floor.

‘It’s the peelers, sure enough !’ said Shawn, and I felt an electric thrill run through me.

Immediately the scene became one of wild confusion, and I found myself in the midst of the *melée*, but before I had time to think in what way I could be of service, the whole of the work was done. The stills were lifted bodily from the ground and taken out of the house, and the stone jars quickly followed. In less than five minutes

all was cleared away, the dripping dog which had caused all the commotion was in the corner making overtures of friendship to my surly retrievers, two of the boys were examining my birds, the girls were washing the potatoes for supper, and the rest of the company were seated around the fire listening attentively to Shawn's account of our adventures that night.

Presently a loud knock came to the door.

'Who's there?' cried Mick Maloney.

'Open the door!' came from without; 'make haste, ye spalpeen, ye. If ye dare to remove one of the stills I see at work—'

The door flew open, and the strangers rushed in. Four men dressed in plain clothes, but looking as little like Irish peasants, whom they were intended to represent, as men could well do.

'Good night, sergeant,' said Mick Maloney quietly; 'if you've come all the way from the barrack to-night to see a shtill at work, I'm sorry for you!'

The sergeant made no answer, but he looked keenly around.

The room in which he stood was the only one which the hut contained. A large kitchen, with a mud floor, black bare rafters and loose stone walls, through the wide crevices of which the wind crept. Over a great turf fire, which burnt on the floor, the pot of potatoes swung, supported by a black iron chain which was fixed in the rafters, while around the fire, sitting cross-legged on the floor, was the family. They moved closer together and made room for the unwelcome intruders. The three policemen sidled up to the fire and unbuttoned their coats, revealing as they did so the revolvers which were fastened in their belts, and the swords which hung from their sides. The sergeant, who had drawn his revolver, still stood aloof.

'Now, Mick Maloney,' he said, 'you've been lying to me and deceiving me for several years, and I don't mean to believe you any more. Don't I know, without your telling me, that you make enough potheen here every year to supply the whole of Connaught? Yes, and I

know, as well as you do, that you were making it here to-night.'

'Were we, in troth?' said the young fellow innocently; 'then why didn't you find us with the shtills?'

'That's exactly what I can't make out,' confessed the puzzled sergeant. 'When I got the information that you were at work to-night, I thought I'd nail ye, for the night's so dark ye can't see a hand before ye, and if I had caught ye,' he continued, putting the revolver into his belt again, 'I'd have clapped every mother's son of ye into gaol, and made ye suffer for the runs you've given to me!'

The boys laughed; the sergeant, judging from the confident faces of one and all that no stills were within reach that night, stood for five minutes warming himself by the fire, then with his men he departed.

All that night I remained in the hut, but when the first gleam of dawn appeared I prepared to go. The fate of the stills was a mystery to me; I questioned Mick Maloney, and after a little hesitation he pointed to a strip of brown bog which lay to the right of the dwelling, and replied,—

'There they are, yer honor!'

'Where?'

'Sunk in the bog there, and the whisky along wid them.'

'There?—why the police might walk over that spot at any moment and discover all!'

'So they might, indeed, but then they don't, and we've hid them there these six years. And if they did find them they couldn't punish us, for sure they're not in any house, and the Lord knows who put them there!'

He walked over the bog, drew up one of the stone jars, and presented it to me, and as I shook hands all round and wished the family 'good-bye,' they all expressed a regret that with last night's work the distilling for that season was over—'but hoped, plase God, I might come next year, and see a good drop made!'

But with that year's work the Maloneys ceased their labour of illicit distilling. A few months after my mid-

night adventure, the faithful animal which had been their sole protector from the police, was found poisoned on the hills. Whether or not the police had at length discovered the use to which the dog was put, and so determined to destroy it, no one could tell; at all events the Maloneys deemed it a fitting time to give up their dangerous work; after they had committed the body of their favourite to the earth, they sold the stills and never again made a drop of potheen.

CHAPTER XIX.

‘Now, yer honor, jist lie quiet and aisy; keep the gun on full-cock and all ready, but never shtir a limb till I give the curlew’s cry, and then look out, for the birds will be jist within shot of ye.’

So spoke Shawn, as he laid the last bunch of heather on my quivering body, and having satisfied himself that I was perfectly well concealed from human sight, he prepared to creep off to the spot where he had seen the wild geese alight, in order to drive the unconscious victims directly over my head. I nodded as he gave his instructions, and ere he crept away, promised implicitly to obey his commands. But I felt anything but comfortable in my novel position. My bed was the bare bog-land, oozy and soft with the soaking of the heavy winter rains; my covering the half-withered heather which Shawn had uprooted from the hillside. The prospect all around me was black and desolate as the sky which loomed above, but the bitter wind came creeping over the hill, and froze my face and hands. I lay patiently for some time, the sportsman-like ardour in my heart preventing the wind from utterly freezing my limbs, but at length my patience got exhausted, and I began to stir. Suddenly I heard the faint whistle of the

curlew,—a minute after I saw a flock of wild geese pass almost directly over my head. I fired wildly, and missed!

Then I found that my garments were completely soaked with bog-water, and that my limbs had sunk several inches deep in the oozy ground; nay, more, that they were only prevented from sinking farther by some obstruction which was so hard and cold that it made my bones ache. My first care was to exhume my half-buried limbs, my next to unearth the substance which had prevented me from sinking utterly. This latter proved to be no easy matter, but with the help of the spade which Shawn had brought with him to prepare my boggy bed, I at length succeeded in clearing away a good deal of earth and discovering that my life-preserver was a deal box, some five feet long, stained almost black with bog-water, and fastened down with half-a-dozen rusty nails.

I had heard, during my childhood days, of fortunate people being enriched by the discovery of buried treasures, but, I need hardly add, all such romantic ideas had long since vanished from my mind; and yet, as I gazed at that peculiar-looking box, I felt as if a cold spell had passed over me, and a succession of the wildest thoughts surged through my brain. Exhume and open it I must, and the wish became stronger within me when Shawn, who soon returned from his goose-driving, did his best to dissuade me from such a proceeding.

‘Sure, ’tis no affair of ours, yer honor,’ said Shawn, looking at the same time so profoundly uncomfortable as to cause my curiosity to increase. ‘Maybe it’s a little potheen that the boys have buried—’

But I cut him short, and insisted that he should help to exhume and open the box. Seeing I was determined, he at length set to work, but he was so slow, and evidently so unwilling, that at length my patience got exhausted. I took the spade from his hand, inserted it in the crevice upon which Shawn had been working, and with one powerful wrench forced the lid. We both recoiled in horror—the box contained a corpse! After the first shock of the discovery was over, I looked again, and my dismay increased tenfold.

‘Why, Shawn!’ I exclaimed, ‘if it isn’t—’

‘Yes, in troth!’ broke in Shawn, ‘sure enough it is,’—and we both stared into the box again.

In order to explain the strange circumstance which enabled me to recognise this corpse, I must chronicle events which took place several weeks before I exhumed it.

On the fifteenth day of November, the annual fair was held at Gulranny. The anticipation of this day usually created a good deal of excitement in the minds of the peasants in and around Storport—for it was always constituted a sort of gala time; but the announcement of the fair of 18—brought with it whisperings of woe to many a home. The crops had been bad that year, and the miserable, half-starved tenants had been unable to scrape together enough money to pay the rent, so the proctor had summoned them to attend the sessions of Gulranny, in order that they might show cause why they should not deliver up the whole of their worldly goods. On the eventful day, which was ushered in with hurricanes of blinding sleet, I ordered Shawn to bring out the horse and car, that we might drive into Gulranny together. By the time we started, the hail had ceased to fall but still the wind blew bitterly, freezing with its icy breath the little pools on the wayside, and when we drove into Gulranny I felt almost as if my blood was frozen. It was midday by that time, and, save for one or two decrepit old men whom we had passed on the road, we were the last to arrive. What a gathering there was! The streets of the little town were so crowded that it was almost impossible to make one’s way along. In the market-place bevvies of rosy-cheeked servant girls stood waiting to be hired, pigs grunted and squealed as the drovers whipped them along, the shopkeepers stood at their doors shrieking to the passengers to buy; Mr O’Neil’s agent sat in a cosy parlour of the inn, comfortably enjoying his glass of wine, gazing with a smile into the wild, woebegone faces of the creatures whom he had summoned thither, and determinedly shaking his head at every heart-broken appeal.

‘Don’t come to me,’ he said; ‘I’m done with ye, a lot of lazy spendthrifts as ye are. Ye’ll go before them to-day as’ll *make* ye pay.’

I sat in a remote corner of the room and quietly watched the wretched creatures who crowded around the man; their wild eyes, their famished faces, their trembling bodies clad in the dirty rags which were their sole protection from cold, and as I glanced from them to the frozen window-panes and the sleet which fell, covering with a thin crystal sheet the kerbstones of the street, my heart turned sick.

‘Poor, miserable, half-starved wretches!’ I thought, ‘most of you will have sore hearts to-night, for you will lose your little all; God help you! for there will be nothing but starvation left.’

Heartsick at the sight of so much sorrow, which I was utterly powerless to relieve, I arose and was about to leave the room, when my eye was suddenly arrested by a figure, ragged, wild, and woebegone, which stood close up by the window. Five minutes before, I had seen this man crouch like a stricken beast before the agent, his skeletonian hands outstretched, his parched lips suing for mercy.

‘For the love of God! Toney Monaghan, niver be hard on a poor boy,’ he had said; ‘all my potatoes had the black disease this year, and they rotted in the ground. My pig took the sickness, and died. I have two little children down wid a fever, and if you take away my cow I’ll have no drop of milk to give them, and they’ll die.’

This appeal, heart-breaking as it was, had met with the usual repulse.

‘Don’t bring yer lies to mè! You’ll go before them as’ll make ye pay!’

As the man crept back into the shadow, I noticed that the piteous look of appeal had left his face; his features were strangely convulsed, his wild eyes gleamed, and his hand clenched and unclenched in nervous dread.

‘That man means mischief,’ I said, as I passed out into the street.

At two o'clock the tenants' cases were to be called on ; and as the hands of the clock approached that hour I made my way through the crowded streets in the direction of the court. I noticed, to my wonder, that the streets through which I passed were almost deserted ; presently a succession of moans and cries struck upon my ear, then I saw that people were running excitedly, and, following the direction which they took, I at length found myself on the outskirts of a great crowd which was collected in the principal street before the open door of the court. Seeing Shawn amongst the throng, I questioned him as to the cause of the excitement, for I noticed that many of the people were wringing their hands, others moaned feebly, while others glared around them with wild eyes and then seemed to utter sighs of relief. Instead of replying to my question, Shawn took me by the shoulders, and gently propelled me into the middle of the throng. There I saw the cause of the disturbance. Lying on the kerbstone, his head supported in the arms of a policeman, his face exposed to the wondering gaze of hundreds of eyes, was the agent, stone dead. His body was surrounded by policemen, warders of the court—nay, at the cry of murder, the very judge upon the bench had stopped the course of justice, and come forth.

'Good God !' I exclaimed, recoiling upon Shawn ; 'how did this happen ?'

'He was jist walkin' along the street, yer honor,' said Shawn quietly, 'when he fell, and laid his head down and died.'

'Murdered ?'

'Oh, God forbid ! yer honor ; what for should he be murdered at all, at all ?'

Nevertheless, I felt convinced that my supposition was right ; nay more, I believed that I could point out the very man who had done this deed.

That a murder had actually been committed could not be proved on the spot, but the manner of the man's death was so peculiar as to call for a coroner's inquiry,

and a post-mortem examination. The body, therefore, was at once removed to the inn, and several hours after its removal the two principal doctors of the town were on their way armed with the implements necessary for their work. On their arrival at the inn, a novel scene awaited them. The people, having at length solved the meaning of the awful words, 'post-mortem examination,' had risen up in arms, and declared that no such desecration of the dead should be allowed. Before Toney Monnaghan became a land-agent, he had been one of themselves, and though he had been a little hard upon them of late, there wasn't a man among them but would raise his voice against having the poor boy's body cut up 'like a beast's.' The consequence was—a riot. The police were overpowered, the doctors sent packing, the inn taken by storm. For two nights the body lay in state, being waked by its wild comrades. At the end of that time, the authorities, only too eager to bring matters to a peaceful issue, allowed it to be quietly buried. As the grave closed above it, popular excitement seemed to die away.

But if the people were satisfied, the authorities were not. Everybody believed that a murder had been committed, and that the subsequent riot was only an effort to prevent the discovery of the murderer. No sooner, therefore, was the unfortunate man buried, than the doctors received an order authorising them to exhume the body and make their examination in secret. One night, two nights after the funeral, they set out on their mission with hopeful hearts. Making straight for the graveyard, they employed themselves in opening up the grave. For several hours they worked with pickaxe and spade; at last they came upon the coffin, raised it up, and opened the lid—

It was empty !

At this piece of audacity on the part of some persons unknown, everybody was more amazed than ever, and again came the conviction, stronger than before, that murder had been done. But try as they would, they could discover nothing. The whole country was thrown

into a tumult, and popular excitement was at its height, when I unwittingly solved the terrible secret by finding the body in the bog.

Having sworn Shawn to secrecy, I assisted him to re-enter the box, and forthwith sent word of the discovery to the magistrate. The box was at once removed, the post-mortem examination concluded, and the discovery made that the unfortunate man had died of heart disease. Again everybody was amazed, and this time the wonder was mixed with shame. After the examination was made, the coroner's inquiry was hurried over, and once more, in solemn pomp, and with all the rites of the church, the agent was laid in his grave. Amidst the solemn concourse which attended this second funeral, I noticed the wild wan face which had haunted me ever since that day when I had seen it by the frozen window of the inn—the face of the very man whom in my own mind I had accused of murder! For a moment I hung back ashamed; then I boldly walked forward and pressed a bank-note into the wretched creature's hand. He looked from it to me in dazed amazement, then the sight of one of his ragged children seemed to make him realise what the money would do. He clutched it closer, and with one last look down the open grave, crept away towards his home.

By whose hand the corpse was conveyed from the churchyard to the bog was never discovered. It was generally believed, however, that news of the intended examination had been whispered abroad, and that the agent was exhumed and hidden solely with a view to preventing his body being 'cut up.'

CHAPTER XX.

TIME passes quickly in Connaught, or at least so it seemed to me; for never had I known summer months roll so

rapidly away. Yet they were gone, and what was worse, the autumn months had gone to join them, and I, still lingering on in Storport, saw that winter was slowly but most surely coming on.

As the seasons changed, the aspect of the village changed too. The mighty Atlantic, which during the lazy summer days had lain like a tawny lion, calm, majestic, gazing with gentle eyes upon the earth, now bestirred itself, lifted up its mighty voice and roared as if in answer to the roaring of the wind. Days of tempest came, during which time I found myself pretty frequently in Oona's study, and always by her side when we sat round the fire at night, and told stories, or listened to the wailing of the wind. Sometimes when the wind was loudest, and we felt the Lodge swaying in its violent grasp, I drew a bit nearer to my cousin and took her hand, and she did not draw it away. Nay, once or twice I fancied that the slender fingers closed over mine, then becoming suddenly conscious of what she had done, Oona would blush and laugh, and tell us some story of folk lore which had been told to her by one or other of the village cauliaghs when she was quite a little child.

It was during one of these evenings, when the wind was shrieking round the house, and hailstones were rattling on the pane, that Oona, gazing round upon her sisters, reminded them of their suggestion that each one should provide me with entertainment for a day.

'He has only had three days as yet,' said Oona; 'Nora's, Bidy's, and mine.'

'And mine,' interrupted Aileen. 'I didn't tell him a story, but then neither did Bidy, but I certainly entertained him for a day, for I took him over to Glenamoy, gave him some of the best flies I ever tied in my life, and put him in the way of catching three salmon. I think that ought to be counted!'

'So it ought, Alley, and so it shall,' I said; 'I never enjoyed a day more in my life.'

'Very well,' said Oona, 'if Jack is satisfied *we* ought

to be, but that only makes four ; there's Kate and Amy still. Kate, what do you mean to do ?'

But before Kate could reply, Amy, who as usual had been rolling on the hearth with the dogs all round her, scrambled to her knees, pushed back the dogs, and exclaimed,—

'I know what *I* should like to do. I should like to tell a story ! Cousin Jack, if I tell you a story to-night will you call it my day ?'

'I will !' I said, and all the girls laughed.

But Amy, grave as a judge, settled herself upon the hearth and told us the story of how Andy-Beg became a Fairy.

She told it in very childish fashion, which I have had to alter slightly to suit the requirements of print.

I.

'Did you ever get sight of it yerself, Cuileagh, when you were passing Rhuna Hanish on a Christmas night like this, on your way to the chapel to hear the mid-night mass ?'

'Get sight of it ! Troth, then, I never did ; and 'tis aisy seeing that same, for sure, then, if I had got sight of it, 'tis not here I'd been sitting now, but I'd be lying in my grave as dead as—as—as—' and finding himself unable to discover a simile, the speaker bent over the fire, squeezed some burning ashes into his pipe-bowl, and began puffing vigorously.

He was a short, thick-set man, with little prepossessing in his appearance. His face was, at first sight, hard and most repelling ; and this, his neighbours said, was the true index to his character. Cuileagh Clanmorris was a most unpopular man in Storport. Instead of mixing with his fellows and showing his face at fairs and weddings and wakes, he worked like any beast of burden all the year ; and on Sundays and feast days, and at Christmas tide, when he had a few hours to spare, instead of enjoying his leisure as a mortal should, he merely stepped into his neighbour Dunloe's, and smoked his pipe in the

ingle, and told weird stories and fairy legends to that child, which, as the population would have it, was no human child, 'but only a bit of a fairy itself.'

And, in truth, there was something about little Andy, or, as he was called in Irish, Andy Beg, which was extremely fairy-like and weird, a strange, old-fashioned wonder and wisdom which had convinced the peasantry, and some of the child's relatives too, that he was no ordinary being. His mother was the widow Dunloe, who had lived all her life in Storport; and who since that night when Manus Dunloe had lost his life off the Rhuna Hanish, had dwelt in the little cabin on the beach, with only her father and Andy.

Andy was six years old, yet he had none of a child's ways, and no desire for childish companionship. The being for whom he cared most was his grandfather, an old man of ninety years, who habitually sat in the ingle, with his grey head bowed, and his bony hands clasped upon his knees, in a state of mental torpor, from which it seemed at times an earthquake could not have roused him, but who, at the slightest sound of Andy's voice, stirred and lived, his dull, heavy, lustreless eyes gleaming with a ray of human light. From the very first these two had been drawn together by a strange fascination. Ever since the day when he first began to walk with some steadiness across the floor, Andy had taken his stand between his grandfather's knees, had prattled to him in that strange, old-fashioned way of his; had attended to him assiduously in all his wants, until, as time went on, the child's life seemed to get interwoven, as it were, with that of the old man; and at length, to the wonder of all, it was discovered that he, who during his life had been singularly hard, callous, and cruel, had got all his affections aroused by this quaint little companion of his old age.

He was very old-fashioned, was Andy Beg; he had a pleading, pinched look in his face, and a strange light in his eyes, and a quiet, unchildlike gentleness in his voice, which aroused the darkest fears in his mother's breast. He was not meant for this world, she said, but he was a little fairy, with a human voice,

and human eyes, and surely a human soul. He had come to them, and had been a blessing to them, but he was perhaps not destined to stay.

Andy Beg was not a strong child. Once or twice during his short life he had been stricken down, and had lain at death's door ; and at those times the old man had awakened from his torpor, and had sat beside the bed, with his dull eyes fixed in agony, as if his life hung upon the child's breath. But Andy had recovered from these attacks, and had taken his place again between his grandfather's knees, his face a little more pinched and worn, his eyes shining a little more brightly, his voice chiming with a still more pathetic ring. The child's face had never looked so old and strange as it did on that Christmas night, when, standing between his grandfather's knees, with his small white fingers resting upon the bony hands of the old man, and his cheek pressed against his sleeve, he had fixed those luminous eyes of his upon the grim countenance of Cuileagh Clanmorris, and had asked him to tell him of the fairy maidens who tended their flocks on Christmas night on the Isle na Creag—that spot of green which was supposed to be visible every year an hour before midnight mass.

Cuileagh Clanmorris puffed hard at his pipe, and between each puff he gazed more fixedly at the child, and as he did so, the hard expression of his face grew tender, and the heavy clouds of smoke more dense. A shade of disappointment stole over Andy's face as he listened to the grim man's speech, and the little white hand began beating upon the bony fingers of his grandfather.

'Sure I thought you had seen it, Cuileagh !'

'Not I, in troth, but 'tis often I heard tell of it.'

For a moment the child stood with his eyes fixed meditatively upon the glowing turf sods ; then suddenly he turned round, gently opened the old man's coat, and dived his small hand deep into a pocket in the inside. This pocket was the child's special property ; it was solely appropriated to his use ; no hands but his ever slipped into it and brought to light the strange medley of things with which it was filled. Andy knew exactly

what was there. He could count on his fingers the number of stones he had, which served him as marbles ; he knew the exact length of the string which wound his top, and the top, too, was there—the one which Cuileagh Clanmorris had brought him that time he went to Gullranny fair. They were safe there, Andy knew ; no one but himself would dare to rifle the old man's coat-pockets ; and the old man himself,—why, he was merely a peg on which the coat hung, although, if occasion required, he guarded Andy's property with jealous ferocity.

So on this occasion the child was pretty sure of finding the treasure he sought. His hand dived to the bottom, then it emerged, holding tightly a piece of white loaf-bread.

'Sure, I will give you *this*, if you will tell what you know to me and grandfather.' And he held forth the bread as an inducement. Among the peasantry of Storport, white bread was a luxury which was seldom seen, and seldom or never eaten ; so, on this occasion, Andy attached to it as much importance as a southern child would do to an apple, a bon-bon, or any other delicacy. Cuileagh Clanmorris smiled, drew his pipe from his mouth, knocked out the ashes upon the hearth-stone, leaned his elbows upon his knees, and looked into Andy's face.

'Ate yer bread, Andy *eroo*, sure I'll tell ye what I know without the likes of that !'

Andy drew back softly with a brighter face, and began munching the bread, and rubbed his cheek against the old man's sleeve, and patted his hand, and added, softly,—

'And you will tell grandfather, too ?' while the old man, who had been aroused by the sound of the child's voice, murmured quietly, in a mumbling, half sleepy tone,—

'Ay, ay,' and dozed off again.

It was a Christmas night.

Outside on the hills the snow gleamed, and when the voices were still the room was filled with a soft, low music floating up from the sea, which washed upon the shingle scarce a hundred yards from the cabin-door. Here and

there on the hills dark figures flitted along, leaving deep tracks behind them in the snow as they passed on towards the chapel to hear Father John say midnight mass. The wind which blew softly scattered the snow and ruffled the surface of the sea.

Andy Beg was fortunate so far as he was spared the misery attendant upon wintry weather and cheerless Christmas nights. A bright firelight played upon him and warmed him, and illumined his pale, pinched little face as he stood between his grandfather's knees with his eyes fixed upon Cuileagh, waiting for the tale.

'Tis often I heard tell of it,' said Cuileagh, 'but whether 'tis true or not, none but the Holy Virgin herself can tell. They're sayin' it rises up from the say there just before midnight mass. 'Tis a lovely island, they tell, with trees and grass and flowers and streams, and in every one o' them flowers there's a fairy, and in every one o' them streams there's a score o' them, and under the trees there's a herd o' cattle grazing, and a fairy colleen watching them, and singing the while, and that herd o' cattle,' continued Cuileagh, lowering his voice to an awful whisper, 'is a herd of mortal men.'

'Well, well!' said Andy, fixing his eyes in astonishment; 'and how did they come there at all, at all?'

'The Lord knows!' returned Cuileagh solemnly; 'but 'tis said they were passing along the say-shore on a Christmas night, when they seen the island itself, and the fairies dancing and capering about, and they laughed and clapped their hands, and for this they were made fairies, and on Christmas night they were turned to a herd o' cattle as a punishment, and since then no mortal man has ever looked on it, and if he does, 'tis a sure sign that 'tis dead he'll be before the year is out, and the fairies will take his soul, and tho' 'tis a grand place, sure 'tis only fit for the likes o' them, but not for Christian men.'

For a few moments Andy stood silent, looking into the fire; then he turned his little pale face, with the fire's red glow upon it, and gazed into Cuileagh's dark eyes.

‘Will I go there, Cuileagh?’ he asked ; and added softly, ‘and will grandfather go too?’

‘The Lord forbid!’ said Cuileagh, as he reverently crossed his breast. ‘Sure you wouldn’t wish to go to the fairies, Andy Beg? and as to your grandfather there, why, the Blessed Virgin herself will take him when ’tis time!’

‘Will she?’ said Andy, opening his eyes. ‘Then maybe she will take me too. Grandfather wouldn’t go alone ; would you, granny?’

He looked wistfully into the old man’s face ; he found no gleam of light there, but he saw the grey head shake slowly.

Andy felt ever so little disappointed that night. He would not leave his grandfather, not for worlds, if the old man went to the Virgin, why, of necessity, Andy must go too, but as he lay down to rest, he could not help thinking that he would much rather be going to the Fairy Island, to hear the fairies singing, and to watch the shining sea.

I I.

All the world seemed white, the mountains were white, covered deep in snow, and the streams and tarns were frozen to crystal ice ; and before all stretched the sea like a glittering, glassy mirror sparkling in the light. As Andy stood knee-deep in the snow and looked around him, his eyes got dazzled with so much brightness. He did not know how he got there ; he did not know why he had come ; he did not know where he was even ; he only knew that he stood alone in the snow, away from his grandfather for the first time in his life.

The little fellow folded his arms to keep himself warm, and looked around again. Behind him the hills stretched in long perspective ; then they got mingled up confusedly, and then they turned into old men’s faces, and gazed at him through hoary hair. Andy felt a little frightened, and looked at the sea. It still lay placid,

and mirrored on its surface were innumerable stars reflected from the heavens above. Not a breath stirred; but as Andy stood looking he suddenly became aware that the air was filled with a soft, low, musical sound, like the humming of a thousand bees. Andy stood gazing and listening enraptured, and then he found that his eyes were not resting upon the water at all, but upon a spot, a lovely green spot, set out yonder in the shining water. He looked again. It was an island, covered with long grass, and tall waving ferns and bright silvern flowers, the scent of which was diffused into the sea breeze and wafted into his face; and he saw figures, bright little fairy figures, moving about amidst these green glades, and their faces, oh! so quaint and old, just like his own, were turned towards him, and their eyes looked into his.

The whole island was flooded with a bright light, which streamed down upon the grass, and the flowers, and the little fairy figures which moved about them. Then Andy's eyes wandered on, and he saw a herd of cattle feeding beneath the trees, and he knew this must be the herd of which Cuileagh spoke, for there, quite near them, sat the figure of a lovely colleen singing softly, with her eyes downcast. Then Andy began to think how much he would like to go there, into that cool and lovely place, and even as he thought so the colleen rose, and turned towards him, and beckoned with her white hand. Andy stretched his hands out too, when suddenly he remembered that he was there alone, so he drew back again, and cried,—

‘I will come! but I must bring grandfather!’

He turned, and at that moment a great clang struck on his ear, a heavy, sonorous sound, like the ringing of bells, in the air flashes of light darted, and a cry was heard like a human voice. Then Andy felt frightened again, and looked behind him, and he saw the island glittering now like a ball of fire; and the tree tops waved, and the fairies danced; the cattle raised their heads, and lowed softly in weary human voices, and as they did so their heads turned to human heads, and their eyes

looked straight into Andy's, while slowly the island split in two and sank softly beneath the water.

Andy opened his eyes, and found he was lying in his bed, with the full cold light of a Christmas morning streaming in his face; the chapel bells were ringing for early mass. He looked around, but he was alone. He never would sleep with his grandfather; the old man looked so hideous and skeletonian in his night gear, his sunken cheeks, and hollow eyes were made so ghastly by a white nightcap, that, much as Andy loved him, he never could trust himself to gaze upon him in this condition; so, instead of running to his grandfather's bedside, and telling him of his dream, he lay quite still and tried to dream it all over again. But when at length he was up and again standing between his grandfather's knees he looked questioningly into his face.

'Grandfather,' he said, 'is it to the Fairy Island you would wish to go, or to the Blessed Virgin herself?'

The old man looked at him for a time bewildered, then he said slowly,—

'Sure all good Christians go to the Virgin, and why wouldn't I go intirely?'

'Because,' said Andy softly, and his face grew more old-fashioned as he spoke, 'because, grandfather, 'tis to the Fairy Island I am going, and I want you to come too!'

III.

From that day, Andy began to change. His face grew more pinched and white, his eyes more luminous, and his manner more old-fashioned and strange. He still stood between his grandfather's knees as he used to do, and attended to the old man's wants, but his voice was sometimes a little peevish now, and he would not speak much to those who were about him. He seemed to become so discontented at times that his mother looked at him, wondering what could be the matter with the child. Andy had always been sickly and white, but he had never been peevish before, he had ever taken

what was given to him with a good grace. Now he turned pettishly from his food.

'Mother,' he said one day, 'why is it that I eat stir-about?'

'Sure, you know we have nothing else in the house to give you, Andy, *eroo*,' his mother replied.

'Sure, then, I know that same,' said Andy, 'but if 'twas in the Fairy Island I was, they would give me white bread.'

His mother crossed herself.

'Never name them, Andy *bawn*. You know you are a Christian child!'

But Andy replied,—

'Maybe I shall be a fairy some day for all that!'

There was something very wrong with the boy, but what that something was none could determine. His mother looked at him again and again with an anxious, scrutinising gaze, but she could discover nothing. Cuileagh Clanmorris came night after night, and smoked his pipe in the ingle, and looked into Andy's face with those keen penetrating eyes of his, and as he did so his thoughts, almost in spite of himself, travelled back to that Christmas, only a month gone by, when he had told the child the fairy legend, and when Andy himself had slept and seen fairy-land.

Cuileagh Clanmorris was superstitious, as were most of the peasantry of Storport, and, as he thought over these things, he shuddered. For this hard-working, coarse-natured man had come to love the quaint little old-fashioned child. Night after night now he brought with him lumps of white bread and gave them to Andy, and as the child stood between his grandfather's knees and munched at the bread, Cuileagh tried to tell him other stories to divert his mind. But Andy took no interest in any but one thing, his thoughts constantly reverted to the old theme.

'I wonder,' he said, one night as he looked into Cuileagh's face, 'I wonder if fairies always eat white bread?'

'Maybe,' answered Cuileagh; 'they're dainty people, they're sayin', and fond o' swate things.'

‘Then, surely,’ continued the child, ‘they would give me bread too?’

‘If ye were a fairy.’

‘And grandfather?’

‘Ay, ay,’ murmured the old man, and he nodded his head, and looked at the child, with a vacant gaze; while Cuileagh murmured to himself, ‘Maybe ’tis a fairy that he is afther all.’

More and more pathetic grew that little pinched face of Andy’s; yet the paler his cheeks became, the more peevish he seemed to grow. There was something very wrong, indeed, for once or twice Andy spoke even to his grandfather in a querulous tone. The old man was dimly conscious of the change, though he was yet too dull to perceive exactly what was amiss. He looked into the child’s face with a pained, questioning glance, whereon Andy grew gentle again as ever, and the tears slowly gathered in his eyes.

The winter passed thus, and as each month rolled away, and the snow was melted from the ground, and the sun shone upon the hills, Andy’s face grew whiter and whiter; and when summer came he lay in a little cot by the kitchen fire, close to his grandfather’s side. He lay there and thought and thought as he looked into the fire, or listened to the monotonous washing of the sea. His peevishness seemed partly gone now, and he grew quiet and gentle, and kind as his custom was. Oh, yes, he was quite like his old self, though he looked so pinched and old, and his little white hands were as thin and transparent as his grandfather’s.

Lifeless as the old man generally appeared, he now grew dimly conscious of what was happening, and his dull, heavy, lustreless eyes brightened into something like life as he watched Andy’s face. He seemed to feel that a chilly hand was drawing the child away, and he began to half realise what the loss would be to him.

Andy could not understand all this, he was too young. He had been so long with his grandfather that he did not dream of parting; they seemed to breathe together.

His grandfather would never leave him, he thought, and as to himself, why, if he became a fairy, grandfather must become a fairy too; and as he lay in his cot day after day, with the summer sunshine streaming full upon him, he thought and wondered over all these things.

‘Cuileagh,’ he said, one day when Cuileagh had strolled in to sit beside him, ‘are they all little people that live in the Fairy Island?’

‘Yes, sure,’ said Cuileagh gruffly.

‘Then, must everybody get small before they go?’

‘Maybe; but what for do ye ask that, Andy *bawn*?’

‘Because I was wondering how grandfather will get there. He is so big, you know.’

‘Sure ’tis not there he will go at all—the Holy Virgin forbid! Never speak of it again, Andy *astore*.’

And Andy never did speak of it again, but he lay in his cot and grew weaker and weaker, until at last he seemed to fade away, and his spirit broke loose, and went to the Fairy Land.

They laid him out in his Sunday’s best, and the neighbours flocked in to look upon the small face and sunken cheeks. Grandfather sat beside the bed, holding in his bony finger’s the child’s clay-cold hand, and gazing upon him in stupefied despair. As he sat there, only faintly feeling his loss, as yet too senile to understand that Andy had gone from him for ever, he saw the people come and go like waves of a living sea, and as each person came up to gaze upon the pale, pinched, pleading face of the child, he heard the same words ringing in his ears, ‘Sure, I always knew he was a fairy, and so he’s gone to the fairies at last!’

I V.

The house was very dull when Andy was taken away. Though he had ever been a quiet child, his very presence seemed to bring light and life with it. But now the merest footfall echoed strangely through the room, and the roaring of the sea was ever heard, and the chilly whistling of the wind. For the summer which had taken

Andy away had faded away too, and another Christmas was drawing nigh. They had all missed Andy, and they had all said so—but one—his grandfather.

The old man lived still.

He had made no mention of the child. With tearless eyes he had watched them take him away, and then he had resumed his old seat in the ingle. There he sat, day after day, like a heavy lifeless log ; he never opened his lips to speak ; he never raised his head to look around ; and he never asked for Andy ; but his bony hands were clasped upon his knees, and his knees were always apart, as if Andy stood between them. He never smoked now, because there was no Andy to light his pipe ; he seldom took food, because the child was not there to give and share it ; he never spoke of Andy, and they thought he had forgotten him entirely. But one day, as he sat there apparently lifeless, he suddenly raised his hand, and put it into the inside pocket of his coat, Andy's pocket, and drew forth the treasures Andy had left—a small piece of white bread, dried now hard as any stone, some pieces of string, and coloured stones and shells. These he held in his hand, and gazed at them with a heavy, stupefied stare, then his fingers closed over them again, and they were put back into Andy's pocket to wait for Andy's coming.

The old man often repeated this, but the treasures were saved from the touch of any other human hand.

Christmas night swept round again, and the peasantry of Storport hurried over the snow-clad hills to hear the midnight mass. In the widow Dunloe's cabin there was no rejoicing ; the sea still washed on the shore with that dreary sound which had called Andy away. The widow Dunloe sat silent, thinking of the Christmas night, twelve months before, when Andy had stood between his grandfather's knees and listened to the fairy tale. Cuileagh Clanmorris was near the fire, smoking hard, but saying no word, and grandfather sat in his usual way with bowed head and closed eyes. The old man was not thinking of Andy, he was now almost too senile to think at all ; but he had closed his eyes and fallen into a doze. As he sat thus, something startled him. He opened his eyes, and

he saw standing between his knees, invisible to all eyes save his own, a little bright figure patting his hand, just like Andy used to do. As the old man looked the figure turned, and a little face was raised up to his. It was Andy's face, grown whiter. The old man looked again—sure enough it was Andy! There he stood, just as he had stood a year ago, and he looked almost the same. He stood for a moment between his grandfather's knees, with his eyes fixed upon the fire, then, still without speaking a word, he turned gently, pulled open his grandfather's coat, and put his hand into the pocket, and drew forth that hard dried piece of white bread and held it in his hand, then with the other he seized the old man's coat.

'Come along, grandfather, come along,' he said, in his old pathetic tones.

The old man half rose from his seat, and looked around wildly with glazed, heavy eyes.

'Ay, ay,' he murmured, then he sank down in his seat again, his eyes closed, and his head drooped upon his breast.

When the Christmas bells rang out with a heavy clang for midnight, they found grandfather sitting in his chair quite dead. His head had fallen forward, his hands hung beside him, and on the floor at his feet lay the crust of bread which Andy had left. Perhaps his spirit had gone from the earth to join Andy on the Fairy Island in the sea.

As Amy finished, still kneeling on the hearth, with her little hands clasped upon my knee, all the girls, in a perfect rapture of delight, kissed her; her father cried, 'Well done, little woman,' and I, noticing that her eyes were heavy, lifted her in my arms and carried her up to bed, a luxury which she enjoyed hugely. She clasped her arms about my neck, and kissed me, for as soon as we got out of Kate's hearing I promised to send her a perfect little angel of a dog when I got back to town.

CHAPTER XXI.

HALF-A-DOZEN days of wild winter weather, then the tempest lulled, the winds hushed themselves, the hail and rain ceased to fall ; and I, accompanied as usual by Shawn, prepared to emerge from the cosy warmth of the Lodge in search of sport.

‘True winter weather, sir,’ said Father John, who had looked in for a minute or so in passing ; and, indeed true winter weather it seemed, for the priest’s fingers were blue, and his round handsome face had also a bluish tinge ; it quickly disappeared, however, before a glass or two of Jamieson.

‘By the way, Mister Kenmare,’ said the jovial ecclesiastic as he rose to go, ‘I’m sadly afraid, sir, that that man of yours, Conolly Magrath, will get himself into trouble ; ’tis but three nights ago since he was nearly surprised heading a Ribbon meeting which was held at the house of Mrs Timlin ; and only last night, I’m told, the police entered his cabin and found a gun which was loaded, and quietly hidden away. At the time of the seizure the man was heavy with the drink—a sore curse to the country, sir,’ he added, in an aside to me,—‘and he set upon the peelers ; but they were one too many for him, since the upshot of it was that they seized the gun, and paid Mr Conolly for his resistance. This morning at daybreak I received a call to come and give him absolution—I’m on my way to him now.’

From the leisurely manner in which the priest had thought fit to obey the summon, I imagined that Mr Conolly could not be at death’s door ; but I, feeling interested, offered to accompany the priest—my uncle, who looked very grave over the matter, volunteered to go too ; so we three set off together. I shouldered my gun, and ordered Shawn to follow, at some slight interval of time, with the dogs.

We found Conolly looking rather the worse for the adventure, but by no means moribund ; he had received a few cuts about the head and face, and had lost a con-

siderable deal of blood. He lay stretched upon the outside of his bed ; and my uncle frowned as he saw that he was being attended to by the republican-minded Mrs Timlin. I was glad to find matters no worse, for I had grown to take considerable interest in Conolly. When Shawn appeared with the dogs, I followed him with a contented mind.

What a day it was ! The wind was certainly lulled to rest, but the fierce rollers of the Atlantic still dashed wildly in upon the sand and around the jagged cliffs, which stood like gaunt spectres, towering up amidst a chilly shower of foam. But the greensward above was sparkling with the radiance of a thousand gems ; the air was crisp and sharp, and the frozen ground crackled and glistened beneath my feet. The estuaries were perfectly alive with birds ; wild duck and widgeon were paddling leisurely about ; the golden plover were running and pecking on the sand, wild geese were lighting on the promontory beyond, and countless sea-gulls were hovering in the clear frosty air. The long range of hills stretched in one jet black line along the clear horizon ; and the tiny thatched hamlets, which were dotted here and there on the hillsides, like sea birds crouching for shelter amidst thick clumps of purple heather, were thrown out and glorified by the clear frosty background.

I had come out intending to have a day on the low-lying marshes, among the snipe ; and I knew that my cartridge belt was crammed with cartridges loaded with number seven ; but the sight of all these birds tempted me, and I suggested that, even with number seven, we should make a trial at the ducks.

But Shawn, wiser than I, shook his head.

‘ ’Twould be but wasting good powder and shot, yer honor,’ said he. ‘ Sure at the present time they’re as wild as wild can be, and wouldn’t let ye come widin five hundred yards o’ them. After a little shpell o’ quiet weather they’ll be worth a trial, but not to-day. Sure yer honor would do far better to keep to the shnipe.’

So to the snipe I accordingly kept, beating the low-lying marshes with a couple of my uncle’s best setters ;

and I was rewarded for my pains ; the frost had drawn them in by dozens, and I managed to make a considerable bag.

We had still another bit of land to beat—and were about to make our way towards it ; when we were arrested by three shrill whistles which reached us from the road. I turned at once, and saw the figures of a man and a woman standing together on the road a few hundred yards away ; the man was waving his hat, the woman was standing on the roadside hard by waving her handkerchief.

‘That last marsh will keep,’ I said, turning to Shawn. ‘I’ve had enough for to-day, whistle up the dogs and follow me to the road ; we’ll walk home that way with Miss Oona.’

For I had recognised Oona at the first glance ; the man I could not identify, but when I got to the road I saw it was young Bingley of Gulranny. Both of them had changed with the changing weather. I saw Oona for the first time wrapped up in heavy furs, and very pretty indeed she looked in them ; while young Bingley, having discarded the kilt, had his legs completely covered by a pair of quaintly cut knee-breeches.

‘Jack,’ said Oona, after I had shaken hands with Charlie, ‘we’ve disturbed you at your sport.’

I hastened to assure her that this was not the case ; that I had quite finished and was on my way to the Lodge ; and I fancied that Oona looked particularly pleased with the information.

‘In that case,’ she continued, ‘you will not mind walking home by the road with me, will you ? Mr Murray is at the Lodge ; he and Charlie are going to stay with us till the morning. You’ll not be long making your call, will you ?’ she said, turning to Bingley ; ‘we shall walk very slowly so that you can overtake us.’

‘No, I sha’n’t be long,’ returned he ; ‘but I think—in fact I know, I can’t stop at the Lodge to-night ; I must get home.’

He stammered, turned red, and looked very uncomfortable as he spoke, and it dawned upon me that there was something wrong. Bingley looked positively

wretched, and there was decidedly a false ring about Oona's careless laugh. I noticed, too, that she, usually the most hospitable of girls, made no attempt to urge him to remain; she seemed somewhat relieved, too, when at last she found herself free of his company and walking along by my side.

'Well, Oona,' I said, when we were alone, 'what brought over Murray and Charlie to-day?'

'They heard that Conolly was killed, and they rode over to hear about it.'

'And they are going to stop all night?'

'They were; but I don't know *now*. You heard Charlie say he must get home!'

'He seems to have changed his mind very suddenly.'

'Yes—did you have good sport to-day?'

'Capital. How came you to be on the road with Bingley?'

'I was walking with him. He had a call to make on one of his mother's fishermen, who lives in one of those huts yonder.'

'And you volunteered to walk with him?'

'No, he asked me, and I thought I should enjoy the walk.'

'And did you?'

'Why, of course I did; don't I always enjoy walking, Jack?'

'I am not talking of always, but of now. Did you enjoy your walk with Bingley, Oona?'

'What a question!' said Oona, laughing; 'I suppose I should have enjoyed it very much if I hadn't got tired. Then I caught sight of you beating the marshes, and I asked Charlie to whistle you up, which he did. Any more questions?'

'Yes, one more. Tell me, Oona,' and I bent down to look in her face, 'what did Bingley *say* to you during your walk to-day?'

What Oona would have replied, I don't know, for at that moment our conversation was rudely interrupted by a wild voice which spoke rapidly and clearly in the Irish tongue. We both started; looked up, and saw at

once the cause of the disturbance. I suppose we had loitered, for Shawn with the dogs had managed to get well ahead of us ; he now stood in the road, facing the person, the sound of whose voice had so rudely disturbed our *tête-à-tête*.

That person was a woman whom I now recognised as having seen once or twice before during my solitary rambles on the bog ; a woman who had succeeded on more than one occasion in arousing my curiosity, but about whom I had always forgotten to question my cousins.

She was certainly a lady : her face, though pinched and worn-looking, and white as that of a corpse, bore the unmistakeable stamp of high breeding. Her figure was angular, and clad as usual in black, while her eyes glared like two wild lights from their cavernous sockets. She seemed to be quite seventy years of age. On her left shoulder was the only bit of colour to be found upon her, and that looked like a random splash of blood ; on nearer inspection one discovered it to be a bit of crimson cloth, ragged and torn, which had been carefully stitched upon her dress. She was evidently very much excited, for, as far as I could make out, she seemed to be pouring upon Shawn a perfect hurricane of abuse, and once or twice I fancied I saw her raise her right hand as if to strike him. To my amazement Shawn took all this without a word ; he hung his head, shuffled his feet, flicked the dog-whip which he held in his hand, but said nothing. I was about to hurry forward and ask an explanation of the whole affair, when I felt a detaining hand laid upon my arm, and looking round I saw Oona, white as a ghost, and trembling in every limb. She had understood every word of the wild Irish harangue.

‘Don’t go forward, Jack,’ she pleaded earnestly. ‘It’s only Mrs Gregory.’

‘Only Mrs Gregory ?’

‘Yes. She is aunt to Mr O’Neil, the landlord here. She is a little violent at times, but after all it’s no wonder, poor thing !’

‘But what have I done to her, Oona?’

‘Nothing, and she is saying nothing to you, but it seems that the dogs have been scampering through her potato fields and breaking down the bines— Now, don’t go forward, Jack!—you might be induced to answer her roughly, and I wouldn’t have that for the world.’

I looked at Oona and saw at once that she was terribly in earnest; her cheeks were pale; her eyes full of tears. At that moment Mrs Gregory, having said her say, passed on. Shawn, now holding the offending dogs on a leash, followed her; next came Oona and myself.

Both my interest and curiosity were aroused by this time, and I would fain have learned more of this extraordinary woman, but the sound of her voice had thrown Oona into such a state of agitation, that I thought it better to turn the conversation to lighter themes; silently determining, however, to elicit the whole story from Shawn, when next we should find ourselves together.

When we reached the Lodge a fresh surprise awaited us. Right before the hall-door was young Bingley on horseback saying ‘Good-bye’ all round. He looked rather shamefaced at seeing us, and confessed that he had avoided us by taking a short cut across the hills. My former suspicions were certainties now. I knew he had asked Oona to be his wife, and the knowledge of why she had refused him gave me a better appetite for dinner.

There was a jolly party at the Lodge that night. Though Bingley had departed, Murray remained, and from the way he looked at Aileen it was not difficult to guess the reason. Father John and the doctor were there; both well on in their cups, and ready with story and song; while in the kitchen sat Conolly, very much disfigured, but looking happy through it all, since he had heard that very afternoon that Mr O’Neil, on being told of the seizure of the gun, had been taken with violent trembling, and had sent word to the barracks that he must be attended by a stronger guard of police.

‘Sure he’s an *omadhaun*, yer honor,’ said Conolly contemptuously, as he told me the story; ‘he’s no better than

a woman, and not half so good as some. And 'tis him, and such as him, as own the broad acres of Ireland.'

I may add, in passing, that it is as bad for an Irish landlord to be a coward as a tyrant. They may respect a tyrant, even while they hate him—but they will never respect a coward.

The evening passed away merrily enough, but just as it was drawing to a close, a message came to the Lodge for Kathleen. A little child belonging to one of the crofters had been taken ill and she was begged 'for the love of God' to come. The child's father brought the message; he was waiting in the kitchen for the answer, Mary said. Kathleen put on her bonnet and cloak to walk back with him, but I expressed my determination to see her safely there and home again; so while she was getting ready, I went to the kitchen to tell the man he might go.

I said what I had to say, had got half way back to the dining-room, when I paused, turned and looked at the man again. He was about the handsomest man I had seen since I came to Storport, but it was not this fact which commanded my attention so much as the strange, unaccountable expression on his face. He was not more than thirty years of age: yet his hair was as grey as my uncle's, who had passed his sixtieth year, while his bronzed face was marked with premature lines. When I mentioned this fact to Kathleen, she sighed, and said, 'No wonder, poor fellow!' but she said no more.

We set out at once, and both enjoyed our walk. The night was clear—the air frosty: already the roads were hardening, while above our heads the moon, full and clear, sailed in a cloudless sky.

We had walked quickly; but the man had reached home first, for when we entered the cabin he was there, I was not surprised to see Kathleen give him a hearty hand-shake, but I confess I was startled to see her walk up to a woman who sat on a bench by the fire with her apron over her head—take her in her arms, and kiss her. This action on the part of my cousin made me look at the woman again. The apron by this time was removed,

and I saw a face—white, wild, and sorrow-stricken—yet strangely beautiful. Though she was evidently only a peasant—and wore the homeliest of peasant dresses—her little feet were encased in thick leather boots, and her hands were delicately and prettily formed. From her appearance I thought she might be a lady masquerading in a peasant's dress. She clung about my cousin's neck, and sobbed,—

‘Oh, Miss Kathleen, I can't bear it. Sure I can't keep in Storport with Mrs Gregory!’

Mrs Gregory again! I started in astonishment as this pretty, trembling creature pronounced the name of my mysterious old lady of the hills. ‘What influence can Mrs Gregory have here?’ I asked myself, and having by this time grown thoroughly interested, I waited to hear more; I was therefore rather sorry when I saw the man come forward and lay his hands gently upon the girl's shoulder.

‘Rosie, *machree*,’ he said, ‘sure 'tis not like *you* to go on like this. Come, get up, *mavourneen*; Miss Kathleen is goin' to look at little May; and here is the young mashter too, that's come with Miss Kathleen from the Lodge.’

This last piece of news produced the desired effect. The girl cast her eyes round the kitchen, and for the first time saw me standing near the door. She unclasped her arms from Kathleen's neck, rose, smoothed back her lovely black hair, curtsied, and murmured, ‘You're welcome, sir!’ at the same time she drew up a form beside the fire, and begged me to be seated.

I could never bear to see a woman cry, especially a young and pretty one: and when I looked into Rose's pitiful face, I felt inclined to do what my cousin had done already—take her in my arms and kiss her. As this was not feasible, however, I contented myself with taking her pretty hand, and holding it for a moment between my own; then when she drew it away, I took the seat which she had offered me by the fire.

Then I saw that Kathleen had gone towards the bed, and was bending over a child.

The cabin was a poor one,—about the poorest on the Storport estate; but though it resembled its fellows in most ways, it differed from them in one. It had the usual black rafters above, mud floor below; turf fire on the floor, and cauldron, ever reminding one of the witch scene in ‘Macbeth.’ At one end of the room was strewn a little straw, which I noticed at once was fresh and clean; and upon this reposed the cow,—a few hens were roosting among the rafters, and a fat pig lay lazily beside the fire. The only furniture in the room was a table, a couple of forms, and a bed; all as clean and fresh-looking as new-drawn milk; while on the bed, between the fresh clean sheets, lay the prettiest little creature imaginable.

Little May was about five years old, and though only a peasant’s offspring was as delicately organised as a little fairy. She had her mother’s black hair and dark dreamy eyes, and evidently her mother’s excitability, for her little hands were clammy and trembled nervously. She was clearly suffering from an attack of some kind of fever, for her face was flushed, and her eyes were most unnaturally bright. Kathleen felt her pulse; laid her cool hand upon the child’s forehead, then turning to the mother, asked if ‘May’ had been frightened again.

‘Sure enough, Miss Kathleen,’ returned Rose, ‘and twill always be the same as long as we stop in Storport.’

Kathleen took the girl’s trembling hand.

‘Tell me about it, Rose,’ she said in her quiet way.

‘She was out by herself to-day,’ said Rose. ‘I let her go, for I was in dread to see her looking so pale, and I thought no harm would come to her; when she was coming home she met Mrs Gregory; she tried to run away for she’s terrified at sight of her, but before she had gone far Mrs Gregory seized her, lifted her up—showed her that red thing on her shoulder, and told her—and told her—oh, Miss Kathleen, I can’t tell you what she told her!’

‘Yes, yes,’ said Kathleen, ‘I understand. Well, is there anything more?’

‘In troth Miss Kathleen, then there is. When she saw

May was frightened, she laughed and clutched her tight, and walked away with her, and May was too frightened to move. She carried her to the lake in the swamps, took hold of the back of her dress and held her over the water, and when May screamed she only laughed, and said she liked people to feel what suffering was; that, if she thought they wouldn't hang her, she'd throw May in and let her drown, just for the pleasure of seeing *my* face when her dead body was washed ashore.'

I saw Kathleen's brow grow ominously dark.

'It is shocking, shocking!' she said. 'Well, Rose, I suppose there is nothing more!'

'Indeed, miss, and there is. She held poor May like that, and dipped her over and over again deep down into the freezing waters, till, what with the fright and the cold, she was almost dead; then she threw her on the ground like a dog, and told her to go home and tell me that Mrs Gregory had done it.'

'Do you know, Rose, this is actionable? I think you must summon Mrs Gregory, and have her bound over to keep the peace.'

To my amazement, Rose trembled more violently than before.

'No, no, I couldn't do that, miss,' she exclaimed. 'I couldn't go into a court. I—I'd sooner go right away.'

'Away from your home and country, do you mean?'

'I do, miss. Sure, what is home and country to me now? I asked Michael to-night, and he said he was quite willing—that it might be better for us to go to America. There's only the three of us, you know, miss; we've got enough money to take us, and I'm sure Michael would get on.'

'Yes, I think he would,' returned Kathleen. 'And so you are willing to go, Michael?'

'I am, miss,' said the man quietly; and Kathleen rose to go.

'Well,' she said, 'I will speak to my father about it, and we'll see what can be done. Meantime, I must put

little May right for you. I'll give Shawn a parcel to leave here on his way home.'

Michael, as Kate had called him, offered to fetch the parcel himself, but Kate assured him it was not necessary. Shawn had to pass the cabin on his way home, and he might just as well leave it. Then we took our leave.

'Kate, I said, when we were well clear of the cabin, 'what has Mrs Gregory to do with these people?'

Kate answered my question with another.

'What do you know about Mrs Gregory?' she said.

'Not much. I have met her twice on the hills, I think, and to-day I saw her again, wildly abusing Shawn because the dogs had run through her potato field.'

'Ah, she is a terrible woman,' said Kate; 'and the marvel to me is that she wasn't shot down long ago like—but there, it is a long story, and a shocking story, Jack. I think, now you've seen Rose, Michael, and Mrs Gregory, I must tell it you, but not to-night.'

During the next three days we were too much occupied either for me to remind Kathleen of her promise, or for her to remember it. Conolly was summoned for assaulting the police, and but for my uncle's interference, it might have gone hardly with him; as it was, he received the sentence of a fine—a tolerably heavy one—which my uncle paid, to the great disgust, as he learned afterwards, of Mr O'Neil of the Castle.

After this excitement was over, I reminded Kathleen of her promise, and she told me the story of Rose Merton.

I.

'Yer honor, for the love of Almighty God, lave me in peace this night. My poor wife is dying, sor—dying wid the fever that's come to her through lack o' food; you'll never have the heart to do that thing this night!'

The speaker, a wild, gaunt, famine-stricken man, clad in the wretchedest of rags, knelt on the ground, and almost kissed the feet of the man to whom he prayed.

They were the centre figures of a large crowd of men, women, and children, some of them almost as ragged and spectre-like as the suppliant himself. The night was dark, the rain was falling, and the wind blew coldly upon the saturated rags which clung to their famished forms: the sky was jet black overhead, save here and there where the lightning played, but the faces of the crowd which had gathered around the miserable dwelling of James Merton were faintly illuminated by the hissing and flaring torches of bog fir held on high by several hands.

But the wild red light was strongest upon the two principal figures of the group; James Merton, wild, ragged, and terror-stricken, crouching upon the ground; Mr Gregory, the landlord, cold and impassive as marble, towering above him.

When the man made his piteous appeal, the woe-begone members of the crowd seemed to hush themselves and listen. What would the master reply? Would he not show one grain of mercy, and leave this poor wretched creature a few hours of peace to comfort his dying wife? They waited, but he said nothing: one glance into the cold marble-like face showed them what he meant to do.

Mr Gregory was by no means a popular landlord; indeed his reign had been one of merciless tyranny—ever since he purchased the estate, and came to dwell in Storport, now nearly twenty years before, the air had been full of wailing voices, and the churchyard rapidly filled with dead; hundreds of his tenants had been turned into living cargo for the American ships; while others had been left to die like beasts upon the road. His motto was pay, or go. When the rent was not forthcoming, the tenant was shipped off to try his fortune in foreign lands; when the tenant could not be got to leave the hut, it was razed to the ground. This system of things had been in vogue, as I have said, for nigh upon twenty years, and still Mr Gregory lived, committing every year fresh outrages, fresh cruelties; but he

had capped the most atrocious of his deeds that night, when he had ordered that the machine of his own invention should be carried down to unroof the miserable hut of James Merton.

Merton was certainly the poorest man on the Storport estate ; he had begun life badly, with a piece of land which was devoid of all nutrition, and a hut which was likely at any moment to tumble about his ears ; besides this he had a fragile, delicate wife, and a pretty, little, delicate-looking daughter : but he was a hard-working, honourable man ; he tilled his bit of land, and managed every year to satisfy the demands of the landlord, voracious as they were. At last, however, he found he could do so no longer. He looked at his wife one morning, and started as if he had looked upon the dead : he saw the truth. Every time he had laid his money upon Mr Gregory's table, he had laid there a drop from the life-blood of his wife. She had paid the landlord, but she was gradually but surely parting with her life. James Merton, rough man as he was, felt a choking sensation come into his throat, and he bent above the turf sods which lay upon the floor, to hide a few scalding tears. He loved his wife. Unlike most Storport marriages, his had been a romantic one, since he had been content to take to his hearth a portionless girl, merely because he loved her : besides this want of dowry, it had been considered by almost every boy in Storport that Rose Monaghan was not a desirable match. She was too delicate to work in the fields as other women did, or to go barefooted and bare-headed to face every inclement season of the year : but it was these very facts which attracted James Merton, and made the great strong man love the girl who seemed to him like a delicate flower ; and Rose loved her husband, and was happy, save now and then when her delicate conscience smote her for having brought him no fortune as other girls brought to their husbands, and when she reflected that she could not help him as they helped theirs by working in the fields, and carrying home the household turf. Still she tried

to make up for it in other ways. She kept her hut as clean as a palace, she was handy at mending her husband's clothes, and when she found that their moderate income was insufficient to meet the demands, she quietly decided that since she was the helpless one, she must be the one to suffer; so although the stern landlord was satisfied, she felt that she was travelling slowly the downward path of life. When Merton discovered the sacrifice that she had made, he uttered no word, but instead of going to his work that morning, he walked over to the dispensary and had a word with the doctor. Two days later Dr Maguire called at the hut, and before he left he had ordered Rose Merton to eat meat and drink wine.

Eat meat and drink wine! where were they to come from? Rose knew very well she could scarcely get milk to wash down the potatoes which were her only food. She ceased, therefore, to think of the doctor's advice: but her husband remembered it.

When the rent day came, and the tenants, according to a rule established by Mr Gregory, went up to the Castle with their rent, Merton went with the rest; his name being called, he entered the room which had been converted into a kind of office, and placed his little heap of silver on the table at which the landlord sat. Then he paused, looked at the stern face of his master, and turned about the hat which he held in his hand.

'Well,' said Mr Gregory, 'have you anything to say to me?'

'I have, yer honor!'

'Out with it then. My time is precious, to-day!'

'Well, yer honor, 'tis just this; the rent o' the bit o' land that I have is a heap too high; yer honor, it is not worth what I have to pay!'

The landlord turned round and looked at his tenant.

'My good man,' he said, 'allow me to tell you that the land is worth just as much as I can get for it. If you are not satisfied with it, leave it. I've no doubt I'd get a little more from somebody else!'

'Tis not that, yer honor,' said Merton quietly. 'I don't want to go, I only wanted to tell yer honor that the rent was high.'

'And how, may I ask, did you make that discovery?'

Merton paused for a moment: then he told the truth. He told how his poor wife had been starving herself in order to keep her husband right with the landlord; he told of the doctor's visit; of the doctor's orders; and he added,—

'If yer honor would be so good as to take down the rent, I could maybe get the things for my poor wife—'

'Then make up your mind once and for ever that I shall not do anything of the kind,' interrupted Mr Gregory, impatiently. 'If all my tenants got reductions on account of sickly wives, I wonder how *my* family would live! *No!* you must pay the rent, or go. As for your wife, I suppose the hospital or workhouse is open to her as well as to others.'

He opened the door, hustled him out, and called in another.

When the next pay day came round, Merton laid on the table just the half of his usual sum, and in answer to the landlord's look of astonishment, he said doggedly,—

'That's all I've got, yer honor!'

'Then what do you mean to do?—go?'

'I do *not*, yer honor—plaise God, you shall have the rest of it next time.'

But that time never came; each pay day Merton found he could only send about the half of his rent to the landlord; so one day he was served with a summons, and a notice to quit.

What was he to do? The little sustenance which he was able to get for his wife had not been sufficient to eradicate the seeds of the disease which had been sown by years of insufficient food. Each day found her worse; and when the summons and notice to quit were put into his hand, she was lying in the bed slowly dying of consumption. James Merton thought a while; then he determined to make one last appeal to his master. He

quietly put the summonses in his pocket, and sat by the bedside holding between his the parched and feverish hand of his wife; when she had fallen into a doze, he left his little daughter to watch her, and walked himself up to the landlord's house. The family had just finished dinner, and when Merton was shown into the dining-room he found Mr Gregory alone, still lingering over his nuts and wine. If Gregory had looked up, he would have seen that the man's face was white and haggard, and almost desperate in its agony—but he did not look up—he continued to crack his nuts, and sip his wine, and asked carelessly,—

‘Well, what is it?’

Merton drew the papers from his pocket and laid them on the table.

‘Does yer honor know,’ he asked, ‘that I have got these?’

‘Of course!’

‘And what does yer honor think that I can do?’

‘You’ll have to do exactly what those papers say—pay your rent or go!’

‘Yer honor, I *can't* pay the rent!’

‘Then you must go!’

‘And I can’t do that neither, yer honor!’

Mr Gregory went on carelessly cracking his nuts.

‘It’s no use coming to me with stories of that kind,’ he said, ‘I’m used to them, therefore they make no impression upon me. You ought to know by this time I mean what I say—therefore, if you won’t pay your rent, and won’t give up possession of your hut, you’ll be turned out neck and crop, that’s all.’

‘Yer honor,’ cried the man piteously, ‘think of my poor wife!’

‘Think of your wife!’ returned the landlord contemptuously. ‘If you had done that yourself she wouldn’t be in my power to-day—she’d be lying in one of the wards of the workhouse! There, get out, I’ve no more time to waste—I want to have a quiet evening.’

And before Merton could think of another word to

say, he found that he had been hustled out of the house, and was walking dejectedly home again.

These constant interviews with the landlord were changing the man's whole nature, and as he walked home that day there was a desperate look about his eyes and mouth which showed the resolution he had taken. He meant to defy the landlord. He meant to let his suffering wife have at least the comfort of dying beneath her husband's roof, with her husband's hands to tend her, and his voice to soothe.

During the next three days Merton had no time even to think of the landlord: his wife grew rapidly worse; and it took all his care to alleviate the suffering which none could cure.

At the end of three days he was reminded of his position by Mr Gregory himself, who looked in and asked him if he was ready to deliver up possession of his hut. For answer, Merton pointed to his wife. She lay upon the bed, worn to a skeleton; her cheeks flushed with the fever which consumed her; her eyes already dim with approaching death. She saw and heard; and dying as she was, her only thought was for her husband and child.

'Yer honor,' she murmured feebly, stretching out towards him her trembling hand, 'don't be too hard on my husband, and my poor little motherless child. It will be right again for them when I am gone away.'

Without a word the landlord turned and left the cabin.

Three days later he appeared again, on a wild inclement evening, which had been ushered in with biting winds and heavily falling rain. This time he was not alone: he had been through the village that day, collecting rents from some, serving processes on others, and razing to the ground the huts of those who could not be made to go. Since he had come to Storport he had invented a machine which at one fell swoop could unroof a cabin, and leave the helpless inmates at the mercy of wind and rain. The machine had committed ravages

that day: it was nightfall before it was set down near the hut of James Merton.

For the most part of that day the poor fellow had sat like one in a terrible dream, watching the light of life gradually fade from the eyes of the wife he loved so well. When night fell, and he heard the murmuring of the crowd which gathered round his hut, he walked to the door, saw, and understood. With a low wail of terror and misery he staggered forward like a drunken man, and fell at his master's feet.

'Yer honor!' he moaned; 'for the loye of God!'

But the landlord said nothing: he shook off the man as if he had been a reptile, and ordered his men to proceed.

The evening had begun badly, but as every hour advanced it grew worse and worse. By this time the wind blew as bitterly as any wind in winter, and the rain was mingled with large drops of hail. A wild night for those who had food and shelter—a pitiable one on which to unroof a hut above a dying woman's head. Yet it was done that night. Amidst the groans of the assembled crowd, and in spite of the piteous pleading of James Merton, the machine was set to work, and in five minutes all that was left of the hut was four miserable walls.

When dawn broke, over tracks of sodden bogland and a limitless expanse of sea, it showed James Merton sitting amongst the ruins of his hut beside the rain-drenched corpse of his wife. Beside him was his little daughter, shivering in the saturated rags which hung about her, and gazing with wistful eyes at all she saw. For she was too young to understand; she only knew that her home was a ruin, and that her mother was stiff and cold.

II.

Twelve years after the events chronicled above, amidst the glorious sunset of a lovely autumn day, a young girl,

none other, indeed, than little Rose Merton, was walking slowly along the high road which led to Storport. Rose was now eighteen years of age. She was tall and shapely, with a pretty face, and large dark eyes, which, when they gazed at you straight, had a strange, wistful expression—the very look which had been implanted there that terrible night when she sat with her father among the ruined walls of her home.

The sunset was glowing all round her, making a picture of the dreary waste ; picking out the little clumps of purple heather, the great black turf stacks erected on the bog, and the ragged figures of men and women who toiled wearily over the wastes with creels upon their backs. But Rose, walking slowly along the road, looked neither to the right nor to the left, but kept her eyes fixed steadily upon the ground as if in deep thought.

Suddenly a hand was placed upon her shoulder—she gave a half-stifled cry, turned round, and looked straight into the face of a man.

‘Michael!’ she gasped, trying to force a smile, and then she held out her hand.

‘Why, Rose, what a start I gave ye,’ said Michael Jamieson, taking her hand and keeping it ; ‘I was cutting turf on the bog yonder when I saw ye pass,—but now I’m done. I mean to walk and have a talk with ye to-night. But first, Rose, darlin’, won’t you give me a kiss?’

Now, for the first time, the girl raised her eyes, and glanced keenly at the prospect about her ; then she answered quietly, with some nervousness and hesitation,—

‘Yes, Michael, if—if you like.’

‘If I like!’ echoed Michael, putting his arm around her, and kissing her pretty lips again and again ; ‘I should think I did like, Rose. . . . Why *mavourneen*,’ he added suddenly, ‘what’s the matter? Why do you turn your face away from me?’

The girl, still nervous and ill at ease, answered strangely,—

‘It’s nothing—nothing—’

They were walking side by side by this time ; again Rose's eyes were fixed wistfully upon the ground. The young man was watching her face.

'Rose,' he said presently, 'I'm in dread there's something on your mind. Of late ye haven't seemed like the bold, brave *colleen* I used to know. Well, I know, you're sorely tried at home. Your father's too much in with the Ribbon boys, *machree*, and if he don't mind it's the young mashter that'll be turning him out of house and home!'

The girl started ; then she looked up with a smile.

'Sure, he'll never do that, Michael,' she said.

'Why not?'

She laughed rather nervously.

'Never mind, but there's no fear of that?'

'Why not, Rose?' asked her companion somewhat sternly.

'Well—because—the mashter has promised to be his friend.'

He started and grew pale as a ghost.

'Promised!' he echoed ; 'who has he promised?'

'Me,' returned the girl, growing more and more nervous. 'I—I spoke to him.'

'*You!*' echoed the man, now paler than before ; '*you* spoke to the young mashter?'

'Sure, there was no harm!' returned Rose. 'Yes, Michael, I spoke to him, and oh, you don't know how kind he is!'

'He's a heap too kind when a pretty girl comes near him.'

'That's nonsense, Michael.'

'I don't know,' returned the young fellow. 'I've heard tales ; but there, what a fool I am, as if I couldn't trust *you* to speak wid the *díoul* himself. Don't mind me, Rose, 'tis only my jealous way. I'll behave better when I've got ye all to myself. Rose, darlin,' he added, bending a bit nearer to her, 'when's the day to be?'

'What day, Michael?'

'As if *you* didn't know ; why our marriage day—to be sure !'

The girl gently withdrew her hand from his.

'Don't talk about that,' she said.

'But I must talk about it, Rose. You've put me off long enough, and you can't say I haven't been patient. Come, look me in the face, *machree*. Why should you be ashamed? We've been lovers ever since we were children, and some day soon we must be something more.'

But the girl positively shuddered.

'Tis folly to talk of it,' she said, 'least of all *now*.'

'Why not now, Rose?'

'Because the world and God are both against us. You know I've got no fortune, not so much as a hen ; and you—you are poorer than ever now.'

The young man smiled,—

'Don't you know what the song says?' he answered lightly, "'Sure poverty's no sin!" I don't want your fortune, darlin', I want but you ; and as to myself, sure enough I'm poor, but I feel if I had but got you by my fireside to help and comfort me I could do the work of three.'

'Ah, that's what they all say before they marry ; but afterwards it's all sorrow and tears. No, Michael, it can't be. I've seen too much of it. Look all round us. Sure there's nothing but trouble and hunger, and every hut has got more mouths than it can feed. Why should *we* marry, to make one more wretched home?'

'Rose!'

'Well, Michael.'

'I don't think them words came out of your right heart. Something has changed you. Some rascal has been turning you against me!'

'No, no, Michael,' cried the girl hurriedly, 'tis not that.'

'But it is. I've seen it a long time back. I've said little, but it made my heart bleed. Rose, a little while ago you didn't look like that or talk as you talk now, and

you used to be as bright as a May mornin', and as kind as a *colleen* could be. Rose, what has changed you? Why do you shrink away when I put my arm around you, and tremble when I kiss your cheek? Oh, Rose, Rose, I've loved you ever since I could think or dream what love meant, and are you goin' to leave me now?'

Pale and tremulous the girl turned towards him and put her little hands in his; it was an impetuous movement, which told him he had touched her heart.

'Michael,' she cried, almost sobbing, 'I love you—God knows I love you!'

He took her hands, held them firmly in his, and looked steadily into her eyes.

'You love me,' he said; 'me, and no other?'

'You and no other, dear,' answered the girl, not flinching from his gaze; 'but, oh, Michael,' she added, quietly drawing her hands away, 'don't let us think of it, we—we're too poor. God is against us!'

'God's never against true lovers, Rose,' answered the young fellow steadily; 'and if your heart's not changed, 'tis His will that we should come together.'

'Ah, no, no!'

'Rose!'

'I—I can't bear it, Michael. I can't face it,' cried the girl, now almost sobbing. 'I'm not like other girls; I think I'm too weak, and you'll say I'm a coward, but I know what poverty means. Michael, listen to me. Don't be angry, but listen. Suppose I could help you a thousand times better by *not* marrying you, suppose I could keep not only you, but father, and everybody in Storport from poverty and trouble, and all by *not* marrying you, what would you say to that?'

The young fellow stared at her in blank amazement.

'What do you mean?' he asked; 'I don't rightly understand.'

The girl turned away her head.

'Nothing,' she answered; 'I mean nothing; I'm silly, and don't know what I'm saying!'

'Rose,' said Michael solemnly, taking her hands and

forcing her to look at him, 'tell me, swear to me, you don't love another man?'

'I don't.'

'Swear it!' he repeated, almost fiercely.

'Well then, Michael, I swear it.'

'Then if that's true, kiss me, Rose, and speak not another word o' sorrow or parting. I see what it is, your father has been bringing trouble to the house, and your heart is a bit down. It was the trouble that spoke, not my own Rose. Kiss me again, *mavourneen*, better times will come; they *must* come; but never say they'll come to us two apart; for without you my life would be wasted, and my heart would break!'

He folded his arms around her and held her close, kissing her cheek and lips, and Rose, clinging to him as if for protection, shed a few silent tears. The bright glow of sunset had faded, and the prospect all round was growing as sombre as the black-looking bog. The lovers walked on hand-in-hand until they reached the hut which was Michael's home. There they paused, and he asked Rose to come in, but the girl shook her head.

'Not to-night, Michael,' she said; 'good-bye.'

'Good-bye! No, I mane to go along home with you.'

Again the girl's agitation returned.

'No, no,' she said! 'not to-night. I—I've a message—I must go alone; but you may meet me to-morrow.'

'You wish it, darlin'?'

'Yes, I do!'

'Then so it shall be; your will is law to me. I'll try and find out what's doing among the boys; mischief, I'm afraid. Good-night, Rose—good-night.'

One kiss and then they parted; Rose walking quickly across the bog until she reached her home.

III.

The only home which Rose Merton had ever known was a wretched hovel, built of moss-covered stones and

mud, and roofed with sods of turf. It contained but one room, which was clean and neat, for Rose had inherited her mother's cleanliness as well as her beauty. The hut was empty; so before sitting down to indulge in reflections, Rose set about preparing her father's supper. Her first care was to remove her bonnet and shawl, and tie on a large apron of coarse holland; then she stood for a moment before the old cracked looking-glass which was nailed up to the wall, to arrange her pretty black hair. Then she set to work. She knocked together the few sods of turf which lay smouldering on the earth, filled the black cauldron with potatoes, lifted it on to the hook which dangled at the end of the thick black chain suspended from the rafters, and her task was done. While she waited for the potatoes to boil, she sat down on the form which stood near the fire and began to think.

First she thought of Michael, and of the interview which she had just had with him; then she thought of young Mr Gregory, the master of Storport.

It was now some time since the young man, attracted by the girl's pretty face and gentle manners, had been secretly paying his court to her. At first, Rose, though certainly flattered by the young master's attentions, had quietly resisted him, for she had promised to marry Michael Jamieson, as handsome and as hard-working a boy as there was in Storport, but afterwards, after much mental deliberation, Rose's mind gradually changed. She knew that despite his steady, hard work, Michael Jamieson was excessively poor, having scarcely enough to feed himself and his old mother who lived with him; therefore it was an indiscreet thing to ask in marriage a portionless girl like herself. Besides, she had been somewhat delicately nurtured, and was therefore not a fit helpmate for a Storport boy. She had never been accustomed to work in the fields; but by dint of her own sharpness, and a taste for sewing, she had managed to gain a little knowledge of dressmaking. In pursuit of this occupation she went about from hut to hut, picking up a few shillings or a meal, and sometimes she went for

a few days to Ballyshanrany to work for my cousins. But Rose had never been able to save and accumulate a fortune like other girls, for her father's hut and wretched plot of land were heavily rented, and her father spent a good deal in drink. Besides the grim pinch of poverty, there were other things which made her gradually look less coldly upon the attentions of the master. The feeling of revolt against want and wretchedness, which was gradually spreading over Ireland, had already touched Störport—the village was known to hold a band of Ribbonmen in its heart; and Rose felt tolerably sure that the leading spirit of the band was her own father.

At the rising of the people she was not astonished; they were desperate men—turned almost into beasts by years of cruel oppression, and now they rose up, like gaunt spectres from the grave, prepared to strike for home and kindred. Rose was terrified, and for the first time she asked herself,—

‘Why should I not listen to the master? If I were to marry him I could save them all!’

It was the first time she had put her thoughts into words, and the words shocked her. For she loved Michael Jamieson, and she did not love Mr Gregory; therefore, it required a good deal of mental deliberation to bring her round to the thought of marrying him. Nevertheless, the decision was ultimately arrived at. Rose determined to sacrifice herself for the good of her people.

Suddenly, however, her plans were again rudely razed to the ground; for since that interview with Michael—since she had read his thoughts and had been prompted to look into her own heart, she knew that if she stretched forth her hand to save her people, her own heart would break. So now she set to work again to think it all over, and wonder what she must do.

Before she had arrived at any decision her father came in.

Those twelve years which had come and gone had wrought a wondrous change in James Merton. His

body was bent, his head snow-white, and his face was wrinkled.

‘You are late, father,’ said Rose, putting her arm gently round his neck and kissing him. Then she turned out the steaming potatoes, and the two sat down and began to eat.

‘Father,’ said Rose, presently.

‘Well, Rose?’

‘I think I’ve got some good work coming. Miss Kathleen was telling me to-day that Mrs Gregory wanted a seamstress, and that she had recommended me.’

The man raised his head, and glared at her like a wild beast.

‘Mrs Gregory!’ he exclaimed.

‘Yes, in troth.’

‘Then you won’t go—do you hear me, Rose, you won’t go!’

‘Not go!’ said Rose, in astonishment; ‘why not, father?’

‘Because I say so!’ returned the man fiercely. ‘Her clothes may rot before my daughter saves them!’

To this the girl said nothing. She rose and began to quietly put away the things, and as she did so, the tears ran slowly down her cheeks. Her father saw them; he put out his hand, and said gently,—

‘Rose, *machree*, come here.’

She went to him; he put his arms about her—drew her gently to his breast, and with his coarse hand smoothed back her silken hair.

‘Rosie,’ he said, ‘my little Rosie, you mustn’t think on what I say. I’m not the man I was, darlin’. These hard times that are coming to us kind o’ stir up the old sorrow, and sometimes I think I’m livin’ through it all again.’

‘Dear father,’ said Rose, as she clung to him, crying a little, and he kissed her tenderly again, as he said,—

‘Rosie, I’ve been thinkin’ o’ your poor mother to-day. ’Twas through old Mr Gregory that she died. You don’t remember it; you were too young, Rose, but he

unroofed the house when she was dying. Sure's he's dead now, and I try to forgive—but I can't forget.'

Then Rose heard the story of her mother's death, and her father's wrongs. Shortly after James Merton left her to think it over alone.

Half-an-hour after her father had left the hut, Rose Merton threw a shawl over her head and went out too, carefully closing the door behind her. It was quite dark, but she knew every inch of the ground which she had to traverse, and could have found her way blindfold.

She went straight across the bog, until she found herself standing in a sequestered part of the road. Here she paused to listen—there was no sound—then she commenced to walk slowly up and down. Presently her quick ear detected the sound of other footsteps. She drew aside; the footsteps came nearer and nearer; apparently she recognised them at last, for she came from her hiding-place and went forward.

'Rose, is it you?' asked a man's voice, in a half whisper.

And the girl tripping forward, replied,—

'Yes, sir, it is I.'

The next moment she felt herself in the close embrace of the young master of Storport.

'My pretty little Rose,' he said, 'I'm late, infernally late; but you've no idea what trouble I've had to get away at all. But now, I *am* here, 'tis all right. Come, give me my reward.'

Instead of holding up her cheek as usual for his careless kiss, Rose turned her head away, and struggled to free herself from his embrace.

'Don't, sir, if you please,' she said.

'Why, what's the matter?' said the young man, astonished. 'Are you angry with me for delaying so long, Rose? Come, come, be reasonable, and give me the kiss of forgiveness.'

But still she struggled and resisted.

'Sir, will you let me go?' she cried; 'some one is coming along the road.'

'Nonsense, 'tis only the wind howling. Why, Rose, how cold your little hands feel. You're not warmly enough clad for such weather as this.

'Sure, I'm not cold,' returned the girl uneasily, withdrawing her hands, as she had withdrawn her body, from his embrace. 'But I—I want to speak to you.'

'Want to speak to me! why, of course you do,' returned the young man, with a light laugh; 'and as to myself, why, I've a thousand things to say. Before I left home to-night I was in a devil of a temper. But there, I don't mean to talk about that or what caused it, for I'm quite comfortable now. Rose, take my arm.'

'In troth, sir, I'd rather walk alone.'

'Take my arm; I insist!'

'No, sir, 'tis not right. You're a gentleman, and I'm but a poor girl. We must never meet again.'

'Hullo!' he echoed, in amazement.

'It's true, sir,' persisted the girl. 'I came here to-night to tell you that same.'

'Rubbish!' returned the young man carelessly. 'You came here to-night, you little witch, to give me a few kisses, as you've often done before. Certainly I'm a gentleman, as you say, and you're not a fine lady; but for all that I love you, and I mean to indulge my whim. Poor! There's nothing money can buy which you shall not have,—fine dresses, carriages, servants to wait upon you. And when you are clothed as your beauty deserves, show me the lady who'll look half as handsome as my little Rose!'

Again he attempted to embrace her; again the girl put up her hand to keep him away.

'Oh, sir, don't talk like that!' she cried pleadingly; 'it was words like them that first made me listen to you, and do all the harm I've done. I thought—God forgive me!—'twould be nice to be a fine lady, for then I could help my father, and some of the poor creatures here; but now, I know I couldn't do it; it would break my father's heart.'

‘Your father! what’s he been saying—have you told him?’

‘In troth, sir, I have not. But to-day he was tellin’ something to me. Sir, Mr Gregory—it was your father that unroofed our hut, and left my mother to die of cold.’

The young man paused for a moment before he replied.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I believe he did; it wasn’t a pleasant thing to do; but whether or not, I don’t see how that is to affect us. You can’t blame me for what my father did. If every man was made answerable for the sins of his relations, heaven knows how the world would get on!’

‘No, sir, I’m not blaming you; I’m only telling you that I can never meet you again, because it would break my father’s heart. Now, sir, if you please, good-night. Let me go home.’

‘No,’ said the young man firmly, ‘you sha’n’t go—not at least till you’ve promised to meet me again.’

‘I can’t promise, sir. In troth, I mustn’t come—my mind’s made up.’

‘Absurd! you know I love you.’

‘Indeed, sir,’ returned the girl sadly, ‘I’m very, very sorry. I humbly beg your pardon for making you think that I liked you; but when you are with your own friends you’ll soon forget me. Good-night.’

He rushed towards her with outstretched arms, and some passionate words upon his lips; when he was startled by heavy footsteps on the road. He paused for a moment. During that moment Rose passed into the darkness, and disappeared.

I V.

While Rose Merton had been having her interview with the young master of Storport, the young man himself was receiving his sentence of death. In a large underground kitchen, in the house of the widow Timlin, about half-a-dozen men were seated—wild, worn-out,

ragged-looking creatures, who gazed at each other in strange intensity, and talked in low, deep tones. They were all tenants on the Storport estate—James Merton and Conolly Magrath being amongst the number—while in the kitchen was the widow Timlin herself, a phlegmatic spectator of all that was taking place. The men crowded close together—showing, in the dimly-lighted chamber, faces of ghastly pallor—for the time being all their eyes were turned upon one member of the band; the very man who had been sent as an emissary to Mr Gregory, and who had succeeded in putting that young gentleman into such a temper before he went to meet Rose. Slowly and methodically the man told his tale.

‘Well, boys,’ he said, ‘I went up to the Castle, and I saw the mashter hisself. I told him the truth. I asked him, for the love of God, to take down the rents a bit, because we were all shtarvin’. He was just about leavin’ the house, so he kicked me out o’ his road as though I’d been a dog—tould me to go to the agent, and tried to get away. But I didn’t let him go. I laid hould on him, and he had to listen.’

The man paused a moment, for he was trembling excessively, and though his manner was stolid, he was evidently much excited. Mrs Timlin, who had been smoking her pipe in a corner, came forward, poured out a glass of whisky, and pushed it towards him.

‘Drink it off, Toney,’ she said, ‘and let us hear all that the black-hearted rascal had to say.’

The man took her advice, and went on,—

‘He warn’t over pleased at bein’ held, Mrs Timlin,’ said he to the widow, who fixed her black eyes upon him, and nodded her wild head to encourage him. ‘And when I told him that we was all shtarvin’, he said, so much the better for himself, it was only clearin’ his estate of so many vagabonds that was bringin’ it lower and lower every year.’

A groan went through the company, and Mrs Timlin’s face looked positively gorgon-like.

‘Bad cess to his black heart!’ said she; ‘go on, Toney.’

‘I tould him we’d all prayed to the agent in vain, and that now, speakin’ for all of us, I went to him. I begged him for the love of Almighty God to come and see for hisself if my tale was true. Boys, he struck me, and kicked me as if I had been a brute baste, and when I staggered back almost blinded wid his blow, he laughed, and walked away! “You’ll starve quietly in future, my friend,” said he; “and when you’re all over seas—which would be the best place for you—perhaps I shall get a little peace on my estate.”’

There was a moment of dead silence; then a murmur ran round the room. Before any definite words were spoken, James Merton rose,—

‘Boys,’ he said, ‘I want to say a few words to you now. You all remember, five years ago, you wanted me to be the man to put a bullet through the young mashter’s head; and when I said “No,” you thought me a coward, because you knew I’d good cause to hate the very name of Gregory. Well, so I had, God knows, and so I have got now. They’ve treated me worse nor the brute bastes o’ the field; and if I’d done right by myself, I should ha’ turned my back on the lot o’ them, and gone straight away to Amerikey the day I laid my poor wife in the ground. I tried to do it, but I couldn’t; I just went to the mashter, and begged him to take me back. What did he say? Though he knew that my poor wife had died for lack o’ food, and because he knew it would break my heart to lave the only bit o’ land that I loved in the world,—he said, “Yes, take your hut and land, James Merton; but you’ll pay the old rent!” Well, I was eager to get the bit o’ land, so I said, “Yes.” I took it, and from that day till the day he died I paid him the rent; though God alone knows what I’ve gone through to do it. That night he died, I thanked Almighty God. Then you came to me, and proposed that I should send the young mashter along wid him; but I said “No,”—I’d got a daughter of my own, and I thought of his poor mother, and I couldn’t bring my hand to strike at an innocent man. I said to myself, “Sure he can’t help

what his father did ; maybe he's got a heart, and will make amends." I waited, and I soon found I was wrong—he was worse than his father ; and when I looked every day on my miserable neighbours, my heart bled. You thought old James Merton was a coward ; you thought he hadn't a heart for ye ; but I'll tell ye what he did—he went up boldly ; and spoke to the young mashter, and he got—just what Toney got to-day—sent out o' the house as if he had been a dog. So now I see what it's goin' to be—starvation and misery ; and I say, "Death to the tyrant wid the black heart that is sending us all to the grave !"

Amidst a low murmur of approval, Merton paused ; a good deal of lively discussion followed ; at the end of it Mrs Timlin, who had been busily at work in a corner of the room, came forward with a little box which she placed in the middle of the table. Every man present knew what that meant. Before dipping their hands into the box, they paused in strange hesitation. Mrs Timlin bared her brown wrist, and without waiting for the others, thrust her hand into the box.

'I mane to have the first pull,' she said, 'plase God, I get the lucky number.'

Amidst a silence which was almost death-like, she drew forth her hand again ; this time her fingers were closed over a slip of paper. The box was handed round ; each man drew his piece forth, then the box was placed on one side, and the men showed their numbers. A piece of paper marked with a black cross had passed into the hand of James Merton.

The man started, and as his eye rested upon the mark, his cheek grew ashen grey. But he quickly pulled himself together and shook the hands of his comrades, one and all, and by that token he accepted the solemn trust which he knew he must fulfil.

V.

During the fortnight which followed that eventful night, there was little peace and no happiness beneath

James Merton's roof. He drank much whisky ; he took scarcely any food ; he looked the very ghost of what he once had been, and when his daughter spoke of this and tried to learn the cause, he turned upon her and fiercely bade her be at peace. If James Merton had been less occupied with what he himself had planned to do, he would have noticed the change that was taking place in Rose. Since that night when she had said her last farewell to Mr Gregory she had never beheld him, but she knew that things in the village were growing worse and worse, and she wondered if she herself was the cause. The agent was harder than ever on the tenants, and he acted, he said, under Mr Gregory's express commands.

Whole families were evicted ; others were cast into prison, and some, after having their houses razed to the ground before their eyes, had actually starved upon the roadside. The people said nothing, but one morning young Mr Gregory was astonished to receive his sentence of death. The young gentleman turned pale for a moment, and, when a little later his agent came up for orders, he handed him the paper.

'Say nothing to my mother,' he said, 'or she'll worry herself unnecessarily. Of course I shall send for a guard of police for the Castle, and I shall order one to follow me wherever I go, so I shall be all right. It must be your task to see that these ruffians suffer for having dared to send me this.'

So the agent went off to obey his master, while the young master, with characteristic recklessness, began to think once more of Rose Merton.

Since that night when she had bade him farewell, he had done little else but think of her. Indeed, he was devising all sorts of means to obtain his end. He had even planned a false marriage, and subsequent desertion, when his difficulties were suddenly solved by Rose herself. She sent to him and begged for another meeting. The young man smiled ; having got exactly what he had been longing for, he ceased to attach so much

value to it; he only thought that since she had been the one to give in, his task would be the easier.

At the time and place which she mentioned, he went to meet her, followed by the constable, his bodyguard. He found her waiting, obedient, respectful, and prettier than ever. But when he came nearer, he saw that she was pale and sad-looking, and he attributed this change to sorrow for himself.

He went up to her and took her hands, and before she could say a word or do anything to resist him, he had thrown his arms about her and kissed her fondly. Rose disengaged herself from his embrace.

'Sir,—Mr Gregory,' she said, 'sure, it wasn't for that I came here to-night. I wanted to speak to ye me ownself about the poor creatures in the village.'

The young man frowned, and angrily bit his lip.

'A deal of love you must have for me, Rose,' he said, 'if you come to plead their cause. Do you know they have threatened to shoot me?'

'Yes, sir, sure I know that same.'

'And you've come to say they'll do it if I don't give in, I suppose; well, let me tell you, my darling, I don't mean to give in. And as for the threat sent to me, I have instructed my agent to see that every man in the village is made to suffer for it.'

'Sir, you haven't done that!'

'I have, and I hope he'll carry out my orders.'

'Oh, sir, you surely haven't the heart to do a thing like that. Sure, they're harmless enough, and they don't want to harm you—all they want is to save their wives and little children, who are just starvin' for lack o' bread.'

'Let them starve! Rose, listen to me. I want to speak to you. Have you reconsidered your last decision—you know I love you, Rose, and would willingly share my home with you?'

'Oh, sir,' cried the poor girl, 'I—I cannot.'

'Rose, don't say that—remember I'm not a man to be thwarted—and it would be better for you to keep me your friend than make an enemy of me. Rose, would

you still say "No" if I offered even to make you my wife ?'

He was thinking of that false marriage which he had planned, but of course Rose knew nothing of this, and he expected her face to be suddenly illuminated at the brilliant prospect of becoming the master's bride. To his surprise, however, Rose stared at him in amazement.

'Your wife !' she echoed ; 'and did you not mean to make me your wife all along ?'

'Our positions are so different,' said the young man uneasily. 'I thought we might have been happy enough without marriage. There, do not be angry—do not turn away—I'll marry you in defiance of all the world, I tell you, rather than give you up.'

'Sir, let me go !' she cried indignantly, trying to free herself from the arms which he had thrown around her.

'No—be reasonable, Rose, hear me !'

He held her tightly to him—but she still struggled.

'I've heard enough, Mr Gregory ! God forgive me for meeting you at all ! But I'm warned in time. Don't hold me, sir, for I won't stay !'

'But I say you *shall* stay !' returned the young man fiercely ; 'who are you to fight against me, the master of Storport—since you won't come with me willingly, you shall come unwillingly ! I won't be made a fool of for nothing !'

He put his hand over her mouth to stifle a scream, and would have dragged her away ; when suddenly he felt a heavy hand seize him by the collar and roughly hurl him aside : he staggered across the road : while Rose Merton, kept from falling by the same firm hand which had hurled off her assailant, looked up, and encountered the gaze of Michael Jamieson. The young fellow's face was quite composed, but his cheeks were very pale ; he looked half sadly, half reproachfully at the girl, but he did not utter a word. Meanwhile Mr Gregory had recovered himself—with a face crimson with rage he came up to the pair who stood confronting each other in the road.

'Who is this fellow?' he asked roughly.

Michael Jamieson still looked at the girl.

'Rose Merton,' said he, paying no attention whatever to the words of the master, 'it's late for a young *colleen* to be out on the roads alone. You'd best get home!'

But the girl trembling violently put up her hands in supplication.

'Oh, Michael,' she cried, 'don't be angry!'

'I'm not angry,' he returned quietly; 'but do you go home!'

'That she shall *not*!' burst in young Gregory; 'who are you that order her?—what's *your* right over her?'

'The right of an honest man, that won't see her put upon by a villain!'

'Fair words, you rascal—'

'I've found out,' continued the young fellow, preserving that *sang froid* which gave him a wonderful advantage over his opponent, 'never mind how, that you've been paying your court to Rose Merton; and when I happened to see the two o' you come together to-night, I thought I'd watch; for I'm her friend, and her father's friend, and I mane to see she comes to no harm. Rose,' he continued, turning again to the girl, who still stood pale and tremulous before him, 'go you home, and leave me to speak wid this man alone!'

But the girl again put out her hand towards him.

'Michael,' she said, 'sure I can't leave you here after me; come with me too!'

'Whoever you are,' burst in young Gregory again, 'you shall not stand between her and me. No one shall; confound you, man, stand aside, or I'll make you!'

'I won't shtir; that's your road, sir, this is hers!'

'Then take that!'

He lifted the cane which he held in his hand, and struck him across the face. Rose screamed. Michael struck the cane from his master's hand, and they closed in a fierce embrace! By this time the policeman, who was ever on the track of the young man, and who had

consequently been a witness of all that had taken place, thought it about time that he should interfere. He came forward, and pulled the men asunder.

‘Hullo !’ he said, ‘what’s all this ?’

‘This ruffian has assaulted me !’ cried Gregory.

‘Are you hurt, sir ?’

‘No, not in the least.’

The man laid his hand on Michael’s shoulder.

‘Shall I lock him up, yer honor ?’ he asked.

But Rose Merton suddenly stepped forward, and almost threw herself at the master’s feet.

‘Mr Gregory,’ she cried, ‘no ! no !’

He hesitated for a moment, then he replied,—

‘No, you may let him go ! I struck him first, and, after all, I’ve got it in my power to punish him in my own fashion. You scoundrel,’ he added, turning to Michael, ‘Rose shall fare no better for your insolent interference, I promise you ! Good-night, Rose.’

He kissed the tips of his fingers, and walked off, while Michael, struggling in the arms of the policeman, cried,—

‘The black-hearted villain ; if he dares to look at Rose Merton again, before God, I’ll have his life !’

‘Keep still,’ said the man, holding him firmly ; ‘and as for you, my girl’ (turning to Rose), ‘you’d best be off ; sure, you’ve caused trouble enough already.’

‘Michael,’ asked the girl humbly, ‘shall I go ?’

‘Yes, go.’

‘Then—then, good-night, Michael.’

‘Good-night.’

She lingered for a moment, half hoping he would say more, but he did not, so she accepted her punishment, and walked quietly away ; but once she was out of sight and hearing, she sat down upon the road-side and cried bitterly.

Michael tried to take the road which Mr Gregory had taken before him, but the policeman stopped him.

‘Come, not that way !’ he said.

‘Don’t be afraid ; I’m cool now !’

‘All the better for you ; but all the same, you’d best get home and sleep it over.’

During the few days that followed, Rose Merton neither saw nor heard anything of her lover. She went to her work every day, but when she returned at night there was no sign of him upon the road ; nor did he come to the hut, as had been his custom, to spend a few of the evening hours with her. It was evident he had not forgiven her, she thought, and so she sat at home, watching and waiting—the picture of misery and despair.

But Rose was wrong. Michael loved her too well to hold out against her ; but he had other things to occupy his mind, for, true to his promise, young Gregory was punishing him in his own fashion. The very day following the attack on Mr Gregory, Michael Jamieson had been served with a summons for rent, which was only just due, together with an intimation that from that day forth his rent would be raised, which was equal to a notice of ejectment. He had received them both without a word of protest, but he began at once to think what he must do. He had not much time to lose, since he was to answer both at the sessions, which were regularly held on the day of the monthly fair at Gulranny.

VI.

The Gulranny Fair, which was held on the first day of October 18—, was destined to be a day made memorable to every tenant of Storport. From dawn the little village was astir, for nearly all the inhabitants had to journey to the town, to drive in their remaining live stock for sale, and answer the summonses which had been served upon them. Gulranny lay some ten Irish miles from Storport, therefore the foot passengers had to start early, in order to be there to meet the agent before the opening of the court. It was quite nine o’clock, however, when my cousin Kate, standing at the Lodge door, saw the agent

drive along, attended by his escort of police, and take the Gulranny road, and about half-an-hour later Kate was called to the door again, she said, by one of the girls, to see the grand car and pair of horses, running tandem, which young Mr Gregory was driving into Gulranny. His mother was seated with him on the car, as well as a man-servant, and a policeman in plain clothes. For though, since the receipt of the warning, no attack had been made upon young Gregory's life, he deemed it prudent to keep his bodyguard in case of danger.

'During that morning,' continued Kate as she told me the story, 'I had to make a few calls upon my patients. I was struck by the strange silence and deserted look of the village, and a sort of terror crept over me; a kind of foreboding, I think, of what was to take place. After I had paid my visits, I took a walk round the village, and noticed the ruins of one or two huts which Mr Gregory had recently had pulled to the ground. Upon the ruins of one sat an old man of ninety, staring stupidly about, as if stunned by the blow which had befallen him. Upon questioning him, I discovered that his hut had been converted into a ruin two days before; that he was penniless, homeless, and friendless; and that he had nothing to eat but the few potatoes which the neighbours had given him. I went to a hut and arranged that he should be taken in and fed; then I walked on to the hovel which was inhabited by James Merton and his daughter Rose. I found that Merton had gone to the fair, but Rose was at home. The wretched room was clean and neat as usual, and Rose was seated on the bed mending her father's rags. She looked sadly pale and worn, and when I questioned her as to the cause of her trouble she only cried, and said that it was nothing. I asked her to come up to the Lodge and spend the day with our servants, but she refused: so at last, reluctantly enough, I got up to go, and left her to pass the rest of the day alone.'

Meanwhile what was going on at the fair? Among the foot passengers to Gulranny that morning had been James Merton and Michael Jamieson. Michael, knowing that

Merton had to answer a summons, had called for him, and proposed that the two should walk into town together. During that minute he had been at the hut, he had seen Rose, and the sight of the girl's pale cheeks and wistful eyes made him feel bitterer than ever against the man who had come between them.

They had plenty of company on the road, but when they got into the town they found the crowd immense. The little streets were thronged with men and women, who were driving in their last remaining live stock to be sold for the rent. A little before noon young Gregory drove in his tandem, scattering the ragged crowd about him like so much mud. He drove up to the door of the principal inn, and alighted. He took his mother to a private room, and went himself to the one where the agent sat. He did not go before he was wanted. The miserable tenants, dreading a court of law almost as much as they dreaded the workhouse, had been driven to make one last appeal. They had sought out the agent—laid their cases before him, and begged him to take half of their debt, and he, having one grain of humanity in him, had promised to lay their cases before his master. He did so, and the master's answer was,—‘No, they'll pay up, or go! I'll have my land, or the money for the land, if they die for it!’

When the answer was given, James Merton stood amongst the crowd. He looked at the upturned faces of the people—he heard their low murmur of heartrending despair; he saw a few scalding tears blind many eyes, and as he was about to turn and walk away, he heard these words whispered into his ear,—

‘Remember, James Merton, *you're* the man.’

During that day, young Gregory strolled aimlessly about the town, while his mother was doing her shopping. He was about to return to the inn to rejoin her at lunch, when, in passing across a deserted square, he came face to face with Merton. He paused, for something in the man's face attracted him, then, without a word, he was about to pass on. But Merton stopped him.

‘Yer honor,’ he said, respectfully touching his forelock, ‘I want one word wid you.’

‘Who are you?’ returned the young man superciliously. ‘I think I know your face.’

‘I’m James Merton, yer honor.’

Gregory started.

‘Rose’s father,’ he thought, ‘but for all that a dangerous ruffian, if what I hear be true.—Well,’ he added aloud, ‘what do you want with me?’

‘I’ve come to speak to you, sir, on behalf o’ the tenants.’

The young man shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

‘My friend,’ he said, ‘I’ve heard so much of that subject lately that it is beginning to get rather uninteresting to me. Besides, this is neither the time nor the place to discuss it. Stand aside!’

But the man doggedly kept his place.

‘Only one word, sir. I humbly ask one word,’ he said. ‘We’re starvin’—man, woman, and child.’

‘And serve you right! you won’t go.’

‘No, sir, we won’t go!’ cried the man, his face for a moment lighting up into positive fury. ‘We can’t be turned out like brute beasts to die in a foreign land. We werè born here, Mr Gregory, and all we ask is to be allowed to live and die here, on the bit o’ land we love. You’re rich, sir, and we’re poor, and we ask you to take down the rents that we may have food. It’s not for ourselves we ask it, but for the wives and little children that are dying wid want and cold. There be other mashters in the county that would give in if you would give in, but I know you are among them that hould out the hardest.’

‘Yes,’ said the young man quietly, ‘you are right. Had I my will, there would be no concessions in the country. I’d *starve* you into good behaviour!’

‘We’re starved already, sir; be merciful. *It would be better for you!*’

‘What do you mean?’ said the young man, turning nervously upon him.

‘Only this; our blood’s up, and there’s no knowing what we might do if you went too far! We are desperate men!’

‘Desperate fools! If the law allowed it, I’d have you *whipped* into good behaviour?’

‘You would?’

‘I would. Good-day.’

He turned, and would have moved on, but Merton clutched him fiercely.

‘Stop,’ he cried; ‘I’ve not done wid you yet.’

‘What!’

‘You’d better listen; you’d better hear me out, Mr Gregory. Once more I say it would be better for *you*!’

‘Do you dare to threaten?’

‘And if I do? I’m not one to threaten what I’m afraid to do.’

The young man turned fiercely upon him, but for some reason he suddenly changed.

‘My good man,’ he said, ‘I must request you to master your temper, or it will certainly get you into trouble before long. And now, in return for your lecture, let me give you one bit of advice. If you really want some concession from me, ask *your daughter* to plead your cause.’

‘My daughter!’ exclaimed Merton, staring wildly at the speaker; ‘what d’ye mean?’

‘Just what I say. There, I’ve heard enough of your whining; but, if you really want concession, send pretty little Rose to me—and—we shall see!’

This time he did walk away quietly, puffing his cigar as he went, while Merton, who had been powerless to put out a hand to detain him, watched him with wild and wondering eyes.

‘What did he mane?’ he murmured, gazing at the spot where the young master’s form had disappeared. ‘Why did he talk like that o’ my Rose, wid that look in his eyes, and that wicked smile on his face? I know, God help me! His father killed her poor mother, and now he’d do worse to the child she left behind. Cold.

blooded, pitiless cur! why should he live to break more hearts? He's spoken his own death-warrant this day!'

Early in the afternoon the handsome car belonging to Mr Gregory was driven round to the door of the inn. Mrs Gregory—a tall, aristocratic-looking woman of sixty, was somewhat astonished at this early departure, but when she heard that her son wished for it, she said no more. She was by no means an estimable old woman,—she was heartless and cruel enough to the world in general,—and she had never been kindly enough to question the cruelties which she knew were regularly practised on her son's estate; but she adored her son, indeed it was said he was the only thing she had ever been known to care for.

When, therefore, he gave his orders, she never questioned them; and, though she would fain have stayed a few hours longer in Gulranny that day, she said nothing, but, when the car was ready, she quietly and proudly took her seat by her son's side.

In truth, Mr Gregory had deemed it advisable to make an early departure from Gulranny that day; for, since his interview with James Merton, and his subsequent sight of the faces of certain of his tenantry, he by no means looked forward with pleasure to the prospect of a dark drive home. But he said nothing to his mother,—it was also the fear of frightening her which made him neglect to provide himself with an extra escort of police.

Thus they drove out of Gulranny before the day's proceedings were nearly over, and certainly before the daylight had ever commenced to fade.

About seven o'clock that night, James Merton, a very weary, worn-out man, walked quietly into Storport. He was astonished to find unusual commotion going on in the village,—certain figures ran hither and thither, others stood in little groups about the road,—while around the house of the landlord gathered a great crowd. There was certainly something the matter, and, before going to

his hut, though he was sorely worn out, Merton walked on to discover the cause of the commotion. He had made one or two inquiries, and had learned the fact that the young master was shot—when he came face to face with my cousin Kathleen. On hearing the news, she had hastened down to the Castle to see if she could do anything for Mrs Gregory—she was now about to return home.

‘This is a shocking affair!’ said Kathleen, in answer to Merton’s ‘Good day.’

‘They tell me the young mashter’s *dead*!’ returned the man, looking quietly at her; ‘is that *true*, Miss Kathleen?’

‘Quite true,’ returned Kate; ‘he was shot this afternoon as he was driving home from the fair!’

‘Was he shot *dead*, miss—or did he spake before he died?’

In recalling this conversation afterwards, Kathleen remembered the peculiar, half-trembling eagerness of the man’s manner—at the time she was too much excited to notice it at all.

‘No, he did not speak,’ said Kathleen; ‘he was shot through the head, and he fell dead upon his mother’s shoulder. Think of that! I wonder she didn’t faint or die with the shock—but she just clasped her arms around the body—and kept it so while her frightened groom drove the horses on to the Castle!’

‘But, Miss Kathleen—the man that done it—didn’t they try to catch the one that fired the shot?’

‘Yes, of course they did,’ returned Kathleen, ‘and he is very likely in custody by this time. You see, when the shot was fired, the horses took fright and bolted—but, as soon as they could be pulled up, the officer who was on the car leapt down and pursued the murderer. I hope it isn’t a Storport boy!’

‘Miss Kathleen,’ said Merton quietly, ‘young Mr Gregory was a pitiless man.’

‘I am afraid he was.’

‘Then, maybe, afther all, perhaps ’tis better that he should be sent away!’

‘Don’t say that, James Merton. Look at it whatever way we will, this murder of the young man was a cruel and shameful act. Think of his poor mother,—whatever he was, she loved him, quite as fondly as you love your Rose,—and to have him shot dead at her side—to have his warm blood scattered over her body—to see him happy and bright one minute, and the next a hideous corpse. No, look at it what way we will, there is nothing can justify *that*!’

‘No,’ said Merton, looking at her with a strange, wild light in his eyes; ‘that’s what they all say when the poor down-trodden creature puts out a hand to strike the tyrant that has been torturing poor souls for years! Say she does suffer—isn’t there others that suffer too? Hasn’t the poor man got a heart the same as the rich to feel for his kith and kin. I tell you, Miss Kathleen, she’s a pitiless woman, just as he was a pitiless man. What did she care for the cries o’ the starving creatures about her, so long as her son was safe, and knew nought o’ sorrow or pain; and now the pitiful cry is all for her, not for the poor creature who has been starved and tortured into doin’ what he’s done.’

He turned and walked away; pushing his way through the crowd, and looking neither to the right nor to the left, until he gained his hut. He found the place empty and in darkness. He lit a rush-light which was fixed in a bottle standing on a table; then he sat down on a form and covered his face with his hands. He was trembling all over by this time—not with cold, but with some inward sinking of the heart. He fancied he could hear the low moans of a suffering woman. . . . The sound of a footstep coming across the threshold made him raise his head. Looking up, he encountered the eyes of his daughter Rose. . . . She was pale as a corpse. . . . she was trembling violently,—with a low moan she tottered across the room, and fell at her father’s feet.

‘What is it, Rose?’ he asked, almost roughly; ‘are *you*, too, coming to ask me to pity the tyrant that’s been sent to his last account?’

The girl raised her head and stared into her father's face with mingled terror and pain.

'Father,' she said, 'don't you know who *done* it?'

The man started, and almost pushed her away.

'How should I know?' he said.

'O God, help me!' cried the girl, with a fresh outburst of grief. 'Father, it—it was Michael Jamieson—him that I love so well.'

VII.

Yes, it seemed all too true. On the evidence of a gun found on the very spot where the murder was committed, Michael Jamieson had been seized and handcuffed as he had been quietly walking home from Gulranny Fair; and Rose Merton, standing on the lonely Storport bog, had seen her lover dragged past her on his way to prison. The poor girl, utterly beside herself with terror and pain, had shrieked out, and rushed towards him; but she was roughly hurled back. Michael Jamieson, they told her, was going to be tried for murder—for the murder of the master of Storport.

This was the story which Rose sobbed forth, kneeling at her father's knee; and as James Merton heard, he became like one stricken unto death. A fortnight before he had, with the money supplied to him by Mrs Timlin, purchased that gun from Michael, and since then—until that very day—it had been kept secretly hidden at the inn. After the fatal shot had been fired, Merton, eager for self-preservation, had fled, and forgotten the gun, which he left lying on the ground.

He had been quite ignorant of the fact that Michael's initials were engraven on the stock. But this fact had been quite enough to implicate Michael, and, despite his firm protestations of innocence, he was detained a prisoner. It was a trying time for Rose Merton, for somehow or other it got whispered about that *she* was the cause of the affair. Everybody knew that Michael was not mixed up with the Ribbon boys, and now that things

had gone so far, the policeman who had been young Gregory's constant escort, told of the meeting he had witnessed between Rose and the young master—of Michael's interference—of the quarrel—and of Michael's threat to take the young master's life. So these things got whispered about, and soon Rose Merton found she could not even cross her threshold in peace.

Two days had passed, and Michael still lay a closely-guarded prisoner in the barracks. Rose had made one or two attempts to see him, but had been decidedly refused.

Meanwhile things were going forward at the Castle. The inquest had been held, and at last, with much pomp, the body of the young master was conveyed to the family grave. Nearly all the tenantry had turned out to watch the grand hearse and coaches go by—but Merton sat at home. He was looking with heavy eyes into the fire, thinking—not of the murdered, but of the living—of Michael Jamieson, whom he well knew was to be tried for a deed which he had never done.

'They'll never hang him,' he muttered; 'no, no; there's no evidence against him, and he'll come out a free man. If I didn't know that I think I should give myself up and tell all; but no, they'll never take Michael's life. I've enough blood on my soul already—enough without poor Michael's. I can't take bite or sup, and at night I can't sleep for thinkin' o' what I've done!'

He shivered all over; he covered his face with his hands and moaned. All was quiet in the cabin; but he could hear the faint echo of the murmuring crowd without, and he knew that the murdered body of the young master was being taken to its last home. White and wild, shaking now from head to foot, he rose, staggered across the kitchen, and shut the door. But the sounds still crept in, and above the keening of the crowd he seemed to hear the mother sobbing. With a cry he staggered back, and fell once more into his seat.

'O God, why did I do it?' he moaned. 'I might ha' known the deed would curse me and drag me down! Sometimes I feel a kind o' yearnin' come upon me to go

and give myself up and end it all—but I can't—I daren't—for Rose's sake; yes, and for the sake o' that other Rose who gave her to me wid her dyin' breath. Oh wife, wife! you were like an angel on this dark earth; and now maybe you're somewhere up yonder among the good folk in heaven, mournin' and grievin' over the deed your man has done.'

His body was shaken now with sobs and tears; he covered his face again, and sat crying like a little child. While he sat thus, the door was gently opened, and Rose came in. She had been crying too, for she had been standing alone on a desolate part of the bog watching the funeral procession as it made its way through the village, and she had been stricken to the heart, believing, as she did, that she was partly the cause of the murder. So she had covered her ears as if to shut out that low moan which haunted her, and had walked sadly home. She had pushed back the door so gently that her father had not heard. Noting his troubled attitude she went sympathetically forward and laid her hand gently upon his shoulder.

'Father!'

'Eh! what's that?' cried Merton, starting wildly to his feet.

'It's me, father—Rose!'

'Rose! my daughter?' he echoed, staring at her; 'why—why do you come on me so sudden? I did not see you.'

He was trembling like an aspen leaf, and his pale face was bathed with perspiration. Rose turned quietly away.

'Father,' she asked presently, 'is there any news?'

'O' what?'

'Of poor Michael?'

'I don't know. Sure I've been too worried to ask. What are you cryin' for? Give me my dinner.'

'Yes, father.'

She crossed quietly to a square wooden chest, lifted the lid, and took out their dinner—a few cold potatoes and a bowl of milk, and set it on the table; then she

took her seat in a corner of the room out of her father's sight. For, despite her efforts to suppress her grief, her tears still flowed fast, and her throat was convulsed with sobs.

'Rose.'

'Yes, father.'

'Is there any drink in the house?'

The girl sadly shook her head. Where was the money to come from, she asked herself, when she could not even buy bread.

'Then go and fetch some,' he answered roughly. 'No, stay, I'll step down to Widdy Timlin's myself. Rose,' he added softly, extending his hand towards her, 'Rosie, *machree*, don't take on so. It breaks my heart to see you. 'Twill all come right in the end.'

Encouraged by her father's gentle tone, the girl came forward, and sobbing passionately, threw herself at his feet.

'Oh, father, father!' she moaned, 'I can't help it! Sure, don't I know 'twill never come right till Michael's cleared!'

'They'll never dare to harm the boy!'

'Ah, father, 'tis not altogether *that* I'm thinkin' of,' returned the girl; 'whatever they do to him there'll be the guilt on him, and he'll never be free o' *that*! He's shed blood, and God will never forgive him; and God will never forgive me my wicked share!'

'Maybe, afther all, he's innocent,' said Merton, watching her quietly. In a moment her face was irradiated.

'Oh, if I could only believe *that*!' she cried; 'but no, father, all the folk say he did it; and isn't there his own gun to *prove* that he did? He's a *murderer*, father—think o' that!—a man all good folk hate—a thing scorned and hated by men, and outcast from God,—with no blessing in this world, and no hope in the next,—an evil thing, with Cain's mark always burning on his guilty brow!'

The girl had spoken impetuously, in a wild kind of

shuddering horror ; as she ceased, her father grasped her hand with a grip of iron.

‘Rose !’ he almost shrieked ; ‘say no more—I can’t listen—’

‘What ails you, father ?’ said the girl, in amazement.

‘You’re too hard on the boy. If he done it in anger or in drink, God may forgive him yet.’

‘Never, never !’

‘It’s a lie !’ shrieked James Merton, roughly throwing her hands aside. ‘Who are you, to speak in the name of Almighty God ? It turns my heart sick to hear you ! Have you got no pity ?’

‘God knows I have,’ returned the girl quietly ; ‘pity and love too ; and, when I think o’ poor Michael, my heart bleeds ; but, father, I can’t help thinking sometimes on him that’s dead. It was very cruel,—he was only a boy, with all the world before him,—and the murderer’s hand struck him down in his strength before he could even say a prayer !’

With a wild moan James Merton fell back half-fainting in his seat.

‘Water,’ he moaned, ‘give me a glass o’ water !’

‘Here, father.’

‘Loosen my neckcloth, Rose. I’m a bit faint.’

With trembling fingers she undid the kerchief which was knotted around his throat, and set his collar free. She held the water to his lips, and with her apron wiped the cold sweat from his brow, and gradually he recovered. His face was still ashen grey, his lips livid, his eyes large and wild.

‘Rosie,’ he said tenderly, ‘I think I’ll lie down a bit, for I’m clean tired out !’

The girl put her arms around his neck and kissed him.

‘Sit down and take your dinner, father,’ she said.

‘Nó, *mavourneen*, I can’t eat ; I’m sick and tired—heart sick, wid all this trouble. I—I—think I’ll lie down on the bed and rest a bit, Rose. Give me a kiss, *machree* !’

‘Yes, father.’

She held up her face towards him, and he kissed it tenderly.

‘Good-night, my Rose,’ he said.

‘Dear father, good-night.’

He gently released her from his arms and staggered across the floor. Having reached the door which led into his little bedchamber, he paused and looked back.

‘Rose,’ he said, and his voice was broken, as if with suppressed tears; ‘Rosie, *machree*, when you were a little child, you used to fold your hands and say a pretty prayer your poor mother taught you. Do you ever pray *now*?’

‘Every night, father,’ answered Rose.

‘For—for your poor mother—and for all your friends—’

‘And for *you*, father, too.’

‘Ah, you shall teach *me* to say it some day, Rose—maybe ’twill make these bad times mend!’

He turned, entered his room, and left his daughter in the kitchen alone.

When he was gone, Rose quietly put away the food which he had left untasted; then she sat with folded hands before the fire.

‘Poor father!’ she murmured sadly, glancing towards the door of the room where he lay. ‘This trouble’s preying sorely on *him*, and he’s growing thinner and greyer each day. It makes my heart bleed to look at him, and to know how little good I am to help him now,—for I can’t work; my heart’s too full. Day and night I’m thinking o’ poor Michael. I can’t believe but he did it; he was so mad against the young master; he swore, in my own hearing, to have his life, and all on account o’ me! Oh, Michael, Michael! if I only knew how to help you!—if I could only comfort you in all this trouble that’s come!’

She rocked herself to and fro, giving vent to the grief which was well-nigh killing her, but which she only suffered to master her when she was alone.

Suddenly she heard herself called.

‘Rose, Rose!’

She started up. It was her father calling her from the inner room. She hurriedly dried her eyes, and ran across the floor.

‘Yes, father!’ she replied, crossing the threshold of the bedroom; then she paused: James Merton, fully dressed, had thrown himself wearily upon the bed, where he lay in a deep sleep. But his sleep was troubled; his breathing was laboured; now and again he muttered some words, and put up his hand, as if to shield himself from danger.

‘Poor, poor father!’ murmured the girl.

She went forward, bent tenderly above him, and gently smoothed back the threads of silver hair which lay cold and clammy upon his brow. At that the sleeper moved again and seized her hands.

‘Rose, Rose,’ he cried, ‘don’t take on so, *mavourneen*, and I’ll tell ye all. *I killed the mashter!* I shot him *dead!*—do you hear?—*dead*, wid Michael’s gun!’

He moaned and turned on his pillow, but the girl did not move; she stood as if suddenly turned to stone, gazing with horror-stricken eyes at the haggard face of her father. . . Presently he moved and spoke again.

‘Rose,’ he murmured, ‘Rosie, *machree*, don’t cry or it’ll break your poor father’s heart. . . I never meant trouble to come to you, and I thought if *he was dead*, we’d maybe have brighter times. So I done it—I murdered him; and now they say ’twas poor Michael as done that same, but it wasn’t. Michael’s a good lad. Rosie, darlin’, say a prayer to-night for your poor old father.’

The grasp of his fingers loosened, and Rose was free. She staggered back and almost fell. The noise awakened her father; he started up, rubbed his eyes, and stared all round him.

‘What’s the matter?’ he cried. ‘What have I said? I thought . . . Rose, what are you there for? Why do you look at me like *that?*’

‘Father!’ murmured the girl, forcing her white lips to speak, ‘tell me, is it—is it—*true*?’

‘*True*! is what true?’ returned Merton; then with a sudden impulse he extended his arms and murmured pitifully, ‘oh, Rose, Rose—God help me!’

His arms were still outstretched towards her, but the girl made no movement to go to him. She put up her hands as if to keep him away, and, with a low moan, fell fainting upon the floor.

VIII.

No sooner was the body of the young master committed to the earth than public attention once more turned upon the man who was generally supposed to have murdered him. Michael Jamieson still lay in the strong room at Storport barrack; for, before being sent to trial, the case was to be thoroughly investigated by the magistrates of Gulranny.

Rose Merton knew all this; she also knew how important it was that she should see Michael before his trial came on; so at last, through the friendliness of one of the policemen at the barrack, she was promised that interview with her lover which she so urgently sought.

It was the night before the day on which Michael was to be taken into Gulranny to undergo his first examination, that Rose Merton walked wearily across the bogs towards the barrack. Having reached the building, she was admitted, and shown without delay into the strong room where Michael lay.

‘Ten minutes, Rose,’ murmured the man, who showed her in, ‘and then you must be off. It’s against orders, you know, to let you come at all, but sure you’ll never spake about it!’

‘Never,’ said the girl solemnly, raising her heavy eyes to his face; and the man, touched to the heart by her haggard look, added hastily,—

‘Sure, it’s meself that’s on duty, *astore*, and I’m rather deaf, so you may just say what ye like to the boy, so

long as ye don't overrun yer time. Now hurry, *avich*, hurry, for I'm in dread till I get ye away again, and that's the truth.'

The room was a sort of dungeon; not unlike a prison cell. It was very scant of furniture, and its one little window was secured by heavy iron bars. Michael Jamieson, who was well liked and respected by every man in the barrack, was suffered to remain here without handcuffs. When Rose entered he was seated dejectedly on the side of his bed; at sight of her face he rose with a joyful cry and folded her in his arms.

'Rose!' he said; my own darlin' Rose!'

He kissed her cheek again and again, and smoothed her pretty black hair; but the girl said nothing,—she just laid her head upon his breast and sobbed like a child. It was the first time she had cried since she had fainted before her father.

'Rose,' murmured the young fellow, 'you've come at last!'

'Yes,' returned the girl, stifling her sobs, 'I have come, God help me!'

'I was thinkin' you wouldn't come at all, Rose, though day and night I've sat waitin' and watchin', thinkin' o' nought but Rose Merton. At every sound I heard I started up, thinkin' it was maybe you come at last, and when the step passed and no Rose came—I knelt down and prayed. God has heard me,—you are here!'

'Oh, Michael, do you forgive me?'

'What have I to forgive, *mavourneen*? Nay, never hang thy head. Are you thinkin' o' him that's dead? Poor lad, as freely as I forgive him, I can forgive you.'

'But, Michael, when you know all—'

'I know it already, Rose—I've spent all my time thinkin' o' it—and now I see you were not so much to blame. What was I, a poor rough lad, by the side o' the young master? What was my love to his? You thought him an honest man, *machree*, and when he spoke ye fair you trusted and believed him. He was

rich—I was poor—’twas only the luck that was against us—no fault o’ yours!’

‘Michael, what are you saying?’ exclaimed the girl, in amazement.

‘Nothin’! Don’t mind me, Rose; thank God, you’ve come—that’s all. I’m to go before the magistrates to-morrow: the sight o’ your face will help me through!’

‘You’re going to be tried?’

‘Yes, Rose;—for murder!’

A convulsive shiver passed over the girl’s frame. She covered her eyes with her hands.

‘Ah, yes!’ she moaned.

‘Why do shrink away? Why do you hide your face? Rose, listen to me—you don’t think that I did it? You can never think *that*! As God’s my judge, I’m innocent!’

‘I know it, Michael—too well!’

‘Too well?’

‘Ay—too well!’ returned the girl in a low, despairing moan. ‘Michael, let me speak. Let me have it off my heart, for it seems hurrying me into my grave. I know you’re innocent—and why?—because I’ve come straight from him as done the cruel deed!’

The young man stared at her incredulously.

‘What!’ he exclaimed; then he added eagerly, ‘speak, Rose—who is he?’

The girl grasped his arm for support, as she whispered,—

‘My—my *own father*!’

‘No!’

‘Indeed, Michael, ’tis true!’

‘*He* killed young Mr Gregory!’

‘He did!’

‘I can’t think it, Rose—it seems too horrible for belief. Why did he do it?’

‘He was one of the Ribbon boys,’ said the girl, in a soft whisper, ‘and he drew the blood-marked paper, and was told off to do the job. Well, he sent the warning, and though he was mad against the young master, he

kind o' shrank from taking his life. So he waited; but things got no better, and the boys urged him on. At last it was arranged that he was to do it on the day of Gulranny Fair. Still he didn't want to do it—and when he was in Gulranny he spoke to the young master and asked him to be merciful to all the poor creatures in Storport !'

'Yes, Rose, go on !'

'Well, the master was fierce with him; said he'd starve every man; and then he said something about *me* ! Father was mad; so he took plenty to drink and started for home. But he only got half way. He went to the spot where he'd hidden the gun, took it out, and lay down behind a mud bank. When the car drove up he fired, and the master fell dead ! Michael, he told me all. He's just broken-hearted on account o' you. 'Twas with your gun he did it; you sold it to him a fortnight ago !'

'God help me; so I did !'

'And, Michael, this is worst of all—they've called *me* as a witness against you ! Oh ! what shall I say ? what shall I say ?'

'Speak the truth, Rose, every word !'

'The truth !' returned the girl; 'and if I do, what then ? You will be free; but I shall have spoken the death warrant of *my own father* !'

'That's true !' exclaimed Michael aghast. 'Oh, Rose, why did you not come to me before ?'

'I could not, Michael. When I asked to be allowed to see you they refused; and even now 'tis Hogan O'Connor that has quietly let me in.'

'Let me think ! let me think ! Oh, *mavourneen*, this is a wicked trouble that has come upon us. . . . If they should find me guilty—but no, they can't do *that*—there be no evidence against me !'

'Oh, Michael, there's the gun !'

'The gun !' returned the young fellow dreamily.

'Sure enough, dear—'twas found on the very spot. . . . Father dropt it in his haste to get away.'

'Then, 'tis black against me. Well, we must trust in God!'

'Michael, what do you mean?' said the girl, clinging wildly to him.

'Just this, *machree*, I want you to remember when you're in the witness-box to-morrow, that 'tis easier to die with an innocent than a guilty mind. I'm young and strong and can bear a bit o' trouble, and he is *your father*. Rose, if you are brave and silent, thank God, he'll never come to harm, for there isn't another soul in the world can spake a word against him!'

'I can't bear it; it will break my heart!'

'Don't say that darlin'; to see *you* grieve is the hardest of all to bear. Since I was a bit of a lad I've had but one thought in the world, and that thought was Rose Merton. True or false I've always loved *you*!'

'And I loved *you*, Michael,—always, always!'

'I'll try to think it, Rose. I'll try to forget that aught ever came between us two. But I don't think I ever loved you as I love you *now*. It's *worth* being here; it's worth sorrow and death itself—to feel as I feel—I think I could die now, free and glad!'

'Michael,' sobbed the girl, 'for Heaven's sake don't talk of dying!'

'I won't! I'll try to think all will come right, and maybe after all it will. Give me thy hand, Rose; look in my face and tell me, come what may, you love me now!'

'I do, I do!'

'With all your heart?'

'With all my heart.'

'That's enough, that's enough,' he murmured, as he folded her to his breast.

'Can you forgive me, dear?'

'Forgive you, Rose? If you could see into my heart and read all the love that's there, you'd never ask that same!'

Their interview was nearly over; they had already far exceeded their time; the policeman appeared and said,

as gently as he could, that Rose Merton must go. Then the girl felt her weakness returning; she clung to her lover.

‘Oh, Michael, I can’t go,’ she sobbed hysterically; ‘I can’t bear it; I must speak!’

But the young fellow tried his best to soothe her.

‘Keep up your heart, Rose,’ he whispered; ‘I’ll fight it through like a man, and take my chance. Don’t think o’ me, but o’ your *own flesh and blood*. Remember if you spake the word that frees me, *your father’s* a dead man!’

‘Oh! what shall I do?’

‘Trust in the Lord to make things mend. Trust in God, Rose, and pray for me.’

Then he signalled to the man to take her; and poor Rose, half distracted and broken-hearted, was led away.

How she got outside she never knew. When she came fully to herself she was standing on the Storport road, within a hundred yards of the barrack.

It was a dreary-looking night. At first it seemed to her that there was no one abroad, but suddenly she became conscious of a figure walking along the road a little before her—the figure of a woman,—tall and stately and clothed in deep black. Rose knew that figure well. It was Mrs Gregory of the Castle—yes, the once proud Mrs Gregory—old and enfeebled now, and leaning on a staff. One moment of hesitation, then Rose ran forward and clutched her dress.

‘Madam,’ she cried, in a low, trembling voice, ‘I want to speak to you!’

The lady paused; but Rose could not see her face, it was covered with a thick crape veil.

‘Whoever you are,’ she answered, ‘it is impossible. I can speak to no one!’

‘One word!’ cried Rose, ‘only one word!’

‘I do not know you!’

‘Oh, madam, you know me only too well!’

The lady raised her veil, and looked into the girl’s

troubled face. As she did so her features hardened ; her eyes glittered like steel.

‘*You* here!’ she began passionately ; ‘girl, do you dare?’

‘Oh, madam, God forgive me for speaking to you in your trouble! I know you’ve cause to hate me and mine—ay, more cause than you know.’

‘Hate you!’ returned the woman fiercely ; ‘ay, more than hate. Had I my will you should *hang* with your wretched paramour.’

‘Madam, for the love of God!’ exclaimed the girl, sinking on her knees.

‘Your face sickens me ; your voice is hateful to me ! Begone, or—or I shall strike you !’

She grasped her cane as if she meant to carry out the threat.

Rose Merton did not shrink ; looking up quietly she said,—

‘Yes, strike me. Blows would be better for me, madam, than even kind words ; but you must hear me.’

‘I will not!’

‘I *will* speak, if you kill me for it ! Madam, my heart bleeds for you, but you can’t mend one dark deed by doin’ another ; and it’s murder you’re goin’ to do, in the sight o’ God.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Just this. Michael Jamieson never harmed a hair of your son’s head.’

‘Don’t speak of it, nor of him ! My curse—’

‘Madam, what does the good Book say ?—“Curse not at all.” I’m only a poor girl, and you’re a great lady, but I’m here to save you from a wicked deed—a deed as wicked as the one you lay at Michael Jamieson’s door!’

‘I’ve heard you, Rose Merton, now hear me. You would tell me that this wretched creature was only one of many. I know it. The murder was planned by the Ribbonmen, and Jamieson was only the instrument !

Silence, and listen ! I tell you I care little now whether or not this man was guilty of the deed itself. Even if you could *prove* his innocence, I would not spare him !'

'You would not—'

'If I had the power,' she continued, growing more and more excited, 'I'd hunt you all down, *you* first of all. You should all hang together !'

'Don't say *that*—'tis not spoken like a woman.'

'Then I will speak like a mother—give me back my son !'

'Oh, if I could ; it would not only heal your heart, but lift the load forever off mine. But I cannot ! What is done is done, and all I'm here for now is to save an innocent man.'

'Begone !'

'I will not go ! What is your grief to mine ? Do you think 'tis only gentlefolks can feel ? Ah, your heart is hard, and you forget that poor folk can suffer too. If you and your son had been a little merciful, he would be alive now.'

'Ah !'

'When we asked for bread, you didn't listen. When the mothers and children were dying for lack of food, you didn't heed. A thousand homes might be empty, a thousand hearts broken, and what did you care ? You had neither pity nor kindness. You drove men mad, and then one poor miserable madman took your son's life !'

The woman rose her height, and pointed with her hand.

'Begone !' she said ; 'you waste your time and mine. I have only one wish—never to see your face again ! Only one regret—that you will not suffer by the side of the wretch for whom came to plead ! . . . Rose Merton, one word more. When my son fell dead into my arms, his life-blood flowed upon my shoulder, soaking my dress with red. I looked and looked at the mark, until it almost burnt into my brain. Then, in case I should ever be inclined to feel pity, I stitched this piece of red

cloth upon my shoulder, just where the blood had been. There it will remain, ever reminding me of my duty, until my vengeance is complete.'

Heart sick and soul sick, Rose raised her eyes, and saw for the first time that a large spot of red, like blood, was fixed upon the woman's shoulder. The sight of it almost made her faint, and with a sickening sense of fear upon her she turned away.

I X.

According to the arrangements which had been made beforehand, Michael Jamieson was next morning placed upon a car, and, attended by a strong escort of police, was driven to the court-house at Gluranny. The trial had excited popular interest, and nearly every Storport boy was in town that day, My uncle and Achill Murry were two of those who were to decide whether or not Michael Jamieson was to be committed for trial. The place where the investigation was held was a large square room, and on this occasion that portion of it which was allotted to the public was crammed to suffocation, while all those who were unable to gain admittance clustered together eagerly about the doors. Among those who had been enabled to obtain seats were Charlie Bingley and his mother. Mrs Bingley, a jolly-looking woman of forty, had a special interest in the proceedings, for since her life had been threatened, not once but many times, since she had felt it her duty to prosecute some ruffians who persisted in poaching her river. My cousin Kathleen was also present; Mrs Timlin, Conolly, and, most prominent of all, Mrs Gregory, clothed in the deepest of black, and with the red mark looking like blood upon her shoulder.

After the preliminaries were gone through Mrs Gregory was the first witness called. She stood like a woman of stone, her features fixed, her mouth set in cruel determination. She still lent somewhat feebly upon a handsome ebony cane, but she gave her evidence in a

plain, straightforward manner, and without a tremor of the voice. When she was done she took her seat in court, and continued to grimly watch the proceedings throughout the day.

Dr Maguire was the next: he had made a post-mortem examination of the body, and told the cause of death. Then came the policeman who had been on the car at the time of the murder, who had found the gun, and who had subsequently taken Michael Jamieson prisoner. He swore to the gun as the one he had found, but he confessed he had never seen it in the prisoner's possession. He simply concluded it belonged to the prisoner on account of his initials being cut upon the stock. They were *M. J.* But he had something more to say. When questioned as to what made him connect *M. J.* with Michael Jamieson, he told of the meeting he had witnessed between the young master and Rose Merton—of Michael's interference—of the struggle—of his threat to take Mr Gregory's life.

Public interest was certainly awakened at last, and when James Merton entered the court, you could have heard a pin drop. He was haggard and worn—but he never lifted his eyes from the ground. His evidence was of little importance. He knew nothing of his daughter's meetings with the young master or of Michael's interference. He had walked with him into Glurranny on the day of the murder, but once in the town they had parted company, and he, James Merton, had started for home alone.

'Did the prisoner refuse to accompany you back?'

'No; I didn't ask him.'

'Why?'

'Why?' repeated Merton; 'I don't know why. I wanted to get home, and I went home.'

'Did anything occur during your walk home?'

'Nothing. I walked straight across the bog. When I got to Storport I heard o' the murder.'

'On the fair day, had the prisoner a gun in his possession?'

‘No.’

‘You will swear it?’

‘I will swear it.’

‘You know that the prisoner possessed a gun?’

‘No.’

‘One moment. Look at this gun.’

The gun which had deprived young Gregory of life was thereupon handed to James Merton. For a moment he shrank half fearfully away—fixing his eyes wildly upon it.

‘What—what’s this?’ he exclaimed. ‘Why do you bring *this* to *me*!’

‘I want you to look at it, and tell me if you have ever seen it before.’

He looked at it long and intently—then he turned away.

‘No,’ he said.

‘You will swear that you have never seen it before?’

‘Yes,’ he returned desperately, ‘I’ll swear it.’

‘You don’t know that it belongs to the prisoner?’

‘No.’

‘You will swear you have never seen him with this gun in his hand?’

‘Yes, I’ll swear that too.’

Merton was ordered to step down, and now there remained but one witness to be called; his daughter Rose. She came into the court looking scarcely like a living woman. Her face was white as death, her eyes were large and lustrous, and as they gazed gently around the court they had in them a strange, wild, wandering look, as if she did not understand what was taking place; and, indeed, she scarcely saw. She was conscious only of a wild mass of people, in the midst of which sat a figure robed in black, with a blood-red mark upon the shoulder. She felt that the pale face was turned towards her, and that the pitiless eyes were fixed upon her as if to read her very soul. She passed her hand across her eyes, then fixed them upon the ground.

'Your name is Rose Merton?'

'It is, sir.'

'Look at the prisoner; do you know him?'

She raised her head and looked steadily over at Michael, who stood pale, resolute, but handcuffed. As their eyes met, her own filled with tears.

'Do you know him?'

'I do, sir.'

'You were, I believe, engaged to be married to him.'

'I was, sir.'

'But like many another of your sex, you preferred the attentions of a gentleman. You also knew the deceased?'

Rose did not answer. Her pale cheek had flushed now, and her tears fell fast.

'Come, answer my question!' said the magistrate sharply; whereat she quietly wiped away her tears and replied,—

'Yes, sir; I knew young Mr Gregory.'

'Intimately? I believe he was a lover of yours?'

'Oh no, no; not that!'

'What! were you not in the habit of meeting him?'

'Yes—we—we met once or twice.'

'You were in his company on the night of the 16th, I believe?'

'Yes, sir, I was. I went to tell Mr Gregory I could not meet him any more, because—'

'During that meeting, what occurred? — did the prisoner appear and remonstrate against your conduct?'

'Yes, sir, Michael came up and threw off young Mr Gregory, who was dragging me away.'

'And there was a struggle between deceased and the prisoner?'

'They had words, sir.'

'And from words they came to blows?'

'Yes, sir,' replied the girl, trembling violently; 'but—it was all my fault; I was to blame!'

'Never mind that, but answer me, on your oath,

did you hear the prisoner threaten to take deceased's life?'

The girl looked up in terror; again she put her hand to her head as if to collect her wandering thoughts.

'Oh, sir,' she cried piteously, 'it was only a few words in anger, he meant no harm.'

'Did he, or did he not, use this expression, "*I'll have his life?*"'

'Oh, sir, don't ask me—I—I—don't know!'

A little more questioning, and Rose Merton, half fainting and wholly distracted, was forcibly removed from the court. Everybody present believed that she had wilfully lied to save her lover's life. The case was now left in the hands of the jury. The magistrate summed up, and the jury returned a verdict of 'Not Guilty.' So Michael was set at liberty, though there were few in court that day, including the jury who refused to convict him, but believed that Michael had been very intimately mixed up with the murder, if he did not actually commit it.

X.

It is nearly six years ago now, said Kathleen, since that night when poor Michael Jamieson came back with the taint of the prison upon him, and yet I remember it as well as if it were yesterday. He had always been a favourite in Storport, and the news of his release excited the people almost to madness: bonfires were lit on the hills, and the villagers turned out in a perfect crowd to welcome him home. Michael himself came back quietly enough, with Rose Merton and her father—he refused to join in the merrymaking, but while the shouts of joy were ringing through the village, he sat beside the fire in James Merton's hut holding Rose's hand. The girl was pale and trembling like a leaf; she had her head turned away from him, and she was crying,—

'I can't, Michael, I can't,' she said; 'don't ask me to do it—I've brought you harm enough, God knows.'

'Rose, don't say that,' returned the young fellow earnestly; 'or if you *will* say it—add that, after all the sorrow and pain, you mean to give me a little happiness by becoming my wife!'

He drew her towards him and kissed her fondly, and she sobbed out her sorrow upon his shoulder.

'Ah, Michael,' she cried, 'you forget—my—my father!'

'No, *mavourneen*, I don't forget—but that makes no difference to me.'

Just a week later, Rose and Michael became man and wife; they were married quietly by Father John. Some of the girls were in the little chapel to witness the ceremony, for Rose had always been an immense favourite at the Lodge, and they would have got up some wedding festivities, but Rose said no—she shrank from any publicity; all she wanted, she said, was to make Michael happy. So she, the prettiest and showiest girl in Storport, was disposed of, and everybody thought that the tragedy had come to a satisfactory close.

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As soon as popular excitement had somewhat subsided, the inhabitants of Storport again turned their thoughts to the question of landlord and tenant. Everyone looked for a new landlord in Storport, for at the death of young Gregory the estates passed into the possession of a distant cousin. As soon, therefore, as he chose to make his appearance in Storport, Mrs Gregory would have to vacate the Castle and take up her residence in a little white-washed cottage which faced the Storport high road, and which had been used for a similar purpose before.

The people looked forward to the change in anxiety, hoping against hope for better times to come. But the news soon spread that no change was likely to take place, at least for some time. The new landlord was in India—he intended to remain there for many months

longer, and in the meantime he left his aunt in full possession of the estates.

If things had been bad under the young man's management, they grew infinitely worse under the management of his mother, for she, believing she had been tricked of her vengeance, looked upon each of her miserable tenants as the murderer of her son. She stalked over the black bogs, with her face set in rigid determination. She was for ever habited in the deadliest of black ; and she wore that sickening spot of red on her shoulder.

Her first act was to evict Michael Jamieson ; and he, knowing the terrible secret, quietly submitted to his fate. He removed to a croft on a neighbouring estate ; then she raised the rent of every holding, and sent many a man, woman, and child, to an early grave.

It must not be supposed that this kind of thing was allowed to go unchecked—a species of civil war commenced with grim determination on either side to fight it through. Periodical meetings were held in Mrs Timlin's kitchen—new agents came and went, terrified by the threats which rained around them. At last, Mrs Gregory determined to face the storm alone.

It was on the night of the departure of the last agent, that another meeting was held in Mrs Timlin's kitchen, and the men, looking into each other's faces, asked themselves what they must do. They knew that their wives and children were starving, and that during the bleak winter which was coming on fresh troubles were sure to arise. The whole village was being sacrificed to gratify the vengeance of one woman. Still, after all, they were men, and they hesitated to raise their hands. Instead of despatching the usual death's head and cross bones, they wrote a letter begging for mercy, and asking her, for the love of God, to remember the fate of her son, who when asked for bread, tendered a stone.

The letter was sent. The next day as Kathleen was walking through the village, she came upon a group

of men who stood surrounding Mrs Gregory. She held an open letter in her hand.

‘You ask me for mercy!’ she said; ‘and I tell you I will show you just as much as you showed when you murdered my son. You cowards, perhaps you would like to murder *me*, if so, you can do so. I’m only a defenceless woman, but I defy you.’

Vengeance had come. That same night a terrible scene was enacted in a hut close to the spot where Mrs Gregory had stood.

Ever since the day when the young master lost his life, James Merton had been a changed man. When Rose married, he went to live with her, and, in answer to her loving words, he promised to try and be happy. Yes, to please Rose, and in the vain hope of bringing the old smile to her lips, and the roses to her cheeks; he had made the promise; but, for all that, he knew that his days of happiness were gone. Whenever he looked at Rose, so pale and sad, his breaking heart was almost rent in two, and his sorrow was not lessened when he saw that her husband’s hair was prematurely mixed with grey. Whenever he walked abroad, his ears were filled with the wails of the suffering people,—and the sight of the woman, black and bloodstained, was for ever before his eyes.

It was a terrible time, and often, as he sat alone by the fire, he thought he would end it all, but for Rose’s sake. Oh, if he could only die! yet, though he prayed, and prayed, death never came.

The change in him came so gradually that Rose, who nursed and watched him carefully, hardly seemed to note it; but one day she looked in his face and seemed to know the truth.

It was one day when she was sitting at home with him alone, for he seldom went out now. Rose was sewing, when suddenly she felt impelled to look up, and she saw that her father was sitting by the fire gazing at her. All at once the truth seemed to dawn upon her; she rose;

threw her arms about her father's neck, and cried, and kissed him.

'Rose,' he said, as he gently stroked her hair; 'Rosie, *machree*, you mustn't grieve—'twill be better for you—and better for me; for I'm just tired out. What's that the Bible says, *mavourneen*—a life for a life?'

'Oh, father, don't talk like that!' sobbed the poor girl; 'I—I can't bear it!'

She fell on her knees before him, took his hands and kissed them, but, with a shudder, he pulled them away.

'Don't, Rose,' he cried, 'they're covered wid blood!'

She saw that his eyes were wandering, so she put her arms about him, and said,—

'Father, you're weary; come with me and rest.'

'Rest!' he repeated, gazing strangely into her face;

I can't rest—for, when I lay me down and shut my eyes, I hear them saying I've done a murder,—and then *he* comes, the young master,—and his face is all covered wid blood . . . Last night, as I was lying in bed, your mother came to my bedside; she was all in shining white, and she looked at me and said, "James, James, what have you done?" When I took her hand, it was cold and dead, and she was crying—why, Rose, you're crying too!'

'I can't help it. Oh, father!'

'Ah, you're thinkin' o' poor Michael—ah, yes, now I know—they mean to hang him; but don't grieve. Rosie, you're a good girl, and I won't bring trouble to you,—I'll see Michael righted before I die.'

He rose from his seat, and, but for Rose, he would have fallen to the ground; she got him to bed, and he sank down like one weary unto death,—for a moment consciousness returned to him,—he stretched out his trembling hands, as he said,—

'Ah, Rose, 'twas well said, my heart is broken!'

At six o'clock the next morning, Mrs Gregory's servants opened the Castle door, and found a man, apparently dead, lying across the threshold.

It was James Merton.

He had fainted, but was not dead, and, on restoratives being applied, he recovered consciousness sufficiently to open his eyes and ask for Mrs Gregory. The old lady was called, and when she came, Merton held forth his hands and cried,—

‘Mistress, mistress, pray God to forgive me—*I killed your son!*’ then, with a low moan, he sank back and died.

In his hand they found a paper bearing a full confession of the crime.

Having arrived at this point Kathleen paused, as if her tale was done. I asked for the rest.

‘There is very little more to tell you, Jack,’ she said. ‘Poor Merton was buried, and his confession made public. It surprised no one. Shortly afterwards, Mr O’Neil, the present landlord, came to Storport, and Mrs Gregory removed from the Castle. Though James Merton was dead and buried, she never forgave the murder of her son: it is generally believed that she incites every act of cruelty and injustice which her nephew commits; she openly defies one and all; she refuses to have any protection; and she puts herself in the power of the very people whom she has treated like dogs. Yet her very courage has commanded their respect and saved her life. Even poor Rose Merton, whom she continues to persecute cruelly, does not wish to raise a finger to harm her. Poor girl, she has certainly suffered enough. I think she was quite right when she said that Storport was not big enough to hold her as well as Mrs Gregory.’

Kathleen having promised to assist Rose, lost no time in keeping her word. America was certainly the best place for her to go to; so to America she was accordingly sent. My uncle and I both added to Michael’s little store of money—while all the girls turned out their wardrobes, and managed to find innumerable articles which were ‘just the thing’ either

for Rose or her little daughter. So the travellers turned their backs upon the sorrow and darkness of the old country to look for brightness, hope, and comfort in the new.

CHAPTER XXII.

‘How chilly the weather is growing,’ I murmured, holding my trembling hands over the blaze which I had made in the grate, and shivering again. ‘I must get that rascal Shawn.’

‘Yer honor,’ said Shawn, thrusting his head in at my sitting-room door.

‘Well, Shawn?’

‘Would yer honor like to see a funeral? ’Tis ould Pat Murphy’s, the cobbler, that was a hundred years, or thereabouts. He died a couple o’ days ago, and he’s had the grandest wake; for I was there myself, on account of the mashter givin’ the candles!’

Here Shawn came to a full stop, gazed at me for a few seconds in silence, and then repeated his question.

‘Would yer honor like to go? ’Twill be a grand funeral, I’m tould; and so it ought indeed; for ’twas time the old man went intirely to make room for them that’s comin’ on. ’Tis only right that yer honor should go, since the whole o’ the counthry will be there; and though yer honor’s often been to a wake and a wedding, sure you’ve never been to the graveyard or seen a funeral.’

And Shawn was right; long as I had lived in Connaught—often as I had made my appearance at weddings, wakes, or fairs, I had never once had the curiosity to go over to the graveyard and witness the extraordinary process which the inhabitants of Connaught employed in committing a body to the earth.

I had seen from afar the small spot known as the graveyard—a square of rugged earth it appeared to me, lying secluded on the hillside, with the barren peaks of the bog mountains above, and the sea washing upon the shore a hundred yards below. I had listened with interest to the wild stories and legends connected with the spot, which Shawn was ever ready to din into my ears, and for me that had been enough. Whenever I heard that a funeral service was to be performed, I religiously kept within doors; or, if I must go out, I determinedly walked in the opposite direction to that in which I knew the corpse must be conveyed. So, despite Shawn's pressing invitation to make one of the riotous company of that day, I determinedly shook my head, and commanded him to withdraw. And yet I could not help feeling some curiosity about the matter, and as the door closed upon the man's muscular figure, I strolled over to the window and took a peep at the arrangements which were going forward for the day's fun: At the door of old Pat Murphy's cabin, which was set on a bog by the roadside, several hundred yards from the Lodge door, a good crowd was gathered, while along the roads, which crossed and branched off in every direction, little parties of sixes and sevens were trudging along to mingle with the great stream, and increase its dimensions, until it seemed to completely surround the house. To eyes unaccustomed to such sights it would have seemed that the whole of the inhabitants of the village were gathering together to make merry at some neighbouring fair; for the women wore their gayest petticoats and head-shawls, while some of the men disported garments of bright, variegated hues. On the preceding night a keen frost had nipped the land, but as the day advanced, the air seemed to grow warmer. The sun rays, falling from a chill grey sky, were melting the ice from both causeway and hill; yet still, upon the peaks of the distant mountains, I could see the faint glittering of frozen hail.

'A capital day for the snipe,' I murmured again, as I

returned to my cosy seat by the fire. 'The first breath of winter seems to put new life into a man. I shall do my twenty miles to-day, and feel the better for it. On a clear, bright, frosty morning, give me the Connaught bogs.'

'Ye'd travel a long way to find their match, sure enough,' put in Shawn, who during my soliloquy had entered the room unperceived; 'but yer honor would never go shporting to-day?'

'And why not?'

'Every why, yer honor; sure ye know 'tis ould Pat Murphy's funeral, and if ye don't wish to go to it yerself, 'tis not like you to be sayin' no to *me*!'

I was astonished, and I said so; but at Shawn's next speech my astonishment increased.

'Sure, I don't care about the funeral then, if yer honor would but let me go over to see poor ould Pat brough to life again.'

'What!'

'They're lavin' the coffin lid off in hopes that the priest, God bless him, may come in time, and if he does it will be all right, for then he can raise up Patrick, and give him the unction, that his ould body may shleep in peace.'

'Shawn, are you gone mad?' I asked at last.

'Not at all, yer honor; sure everybody knows that he raised up Rose Monnaghan, on account o' her dyin' widout confession, and then he got her to confess, and she died again quiet and aisy, and had a grand wake, and was buried dacently; and when he did it to the likes o' her, why can't he do it to ould Patrick, who died widout confessin', on account of his riverence bein' away?'

This rigmarole amazed me. I demanded a lucid explanation from Shawn, and received only his emphatic assurance, that there was 'devil a word of a lie in it, at all, at all.'

'Ask anybody, and ye'll find it's all true; ask his riverence,' he said, when he suddenly paused, and added, — 'well, indeed, maybe his riverence wouldn't own to it at

all. He said himself 'twas in a faint she was, and when he put the water on her face, it brought her round to spake to them before she died.'

'And between you and me, Shawn, I think his riverence was right.'

'Do you, indeed, sor; well, if you'll just shtep over to the graveyard to-day, ye'll see ould Pat Murphy brought round, if his riverence has a mind to do it.'

'You think I should?'

'I'm certain sure of it.'

'Very well then, I'll go. I'll just wait until the funeral procession has got well a-head, and then I will take a short cut to the graveyard by myself!'

Having gratified the wish of Shawn's heart, and determined to satisfy my own curiosity, which I must confess was by that time strongly aroused, I walked again over to the window, and took another glance at the people who were still congregating about the hut.

What a crowd it had become! the house was surrounded; the road was well covered; while still from the hillsides, over bog and moor, and along the numerous rugged roads, came straggling figures, some of them footsore from long travelling, others huddling their rags about their attenuated frames, and shrinking from the chilly touch of the air; but finally all of them became merged into the great crowd, as runlets mingle in the sea. One or two hours passed and I became restless; the gradual increasing of the crowd, the protracted delay, stimulated my morbid curiosity, and I began to long for the time to come when this strange event was to take place at the grave. Not that I altogether believed what Shawn had told me, I had heard too many of his legends for that; nor did I for a moment imagine that anything extraordinary would happen to prevent the interment of the corpse; but I did anticipate a peculiar sight, and as I had determined to witness it, the delay in doing so annoyed me. But the inhabitants of Storport were not accustomed to quick movements. Slowly the great crowd increased until the road was completely blocked, and the mingled

voices of the people reached my ears as I stood at the open window of my room. It certainly was going to be 'a grand funeral.' Men and women, boys and girls, of all ages, sizes and degrees, and from all parts of the country around, were by that time gathered together. Some of them carried jars under their arms; others drinking-vessels; while, to my amazement, others had got creels of turf upon their backs, as if that too was meant as a contribution to the ceremony of the day. At length the crowd made a swaying movement, and then began to move in one long, straggling mass up from the cabin. I looked searchingly along the lines of grotesque figures, and at length perceived the coffin, a box of white deal, standing in the middle of a sheet, the ends of which were carelessly held by two men. The crowd moved so quickly, and the road was so rugged to tread, that the coffin was jolted and swung in such a violent manner as to cause the loose lid to fall once or twice almost to the ground; but the carpenter who made the coffin, and now walked beside it, carrying in his hand the hammer and nails which would be necessary for the completion of his work, lifted from the road a heavy stone and placed it on the coffin lid to keep it in its place. Again I turned from the window, and crossing over to the hearth, stood with my back to the fire. That it would be useless for me to attempt to leave the house for several hours I knew, since the funeral party had to cross the estuary, and there was only one boat to take the whole lot. It would occupy fully two hours, I reflected, plying backwards and forwards, to convey across the living and the dead. So having given Shawn leave to depart at once, and having had something to eat, I took up a book to pass the time away. How long I read I don't know, I only remember coming to myself with a start and leaping confusedly to my feet, to find the fire low in the grate, the day waning, and the air bitterly cold. I opened the window and looked out; there was no living soul abroad. The waning light of the sky fell upon the village, lying chill and silent, with the black bogs stretching ominously around,

but in the air there was the faint echo of a wild moaning and shrieking which was wafted to me by the breath of the sea, and which I knew must come from the graveyard.

I hurriedly buttoned on my coat, and left the house.

The evening air was bitter ; thick sheets of ice covered the causeway, and even the brown bogs were hard and easy to tread. I made my way quickly ; in half-an-hour I had crossed the ferry, plodded over the sands, and stood upon the brow of a hill looking down upon the graveyard. But could it be a graveyard ? It was more like a scene from the *Inferno*. Half-a-dozen fires blazed up, illuminating hundreds of recumbent figures. Stone jars were tossed about ; drinking vessels scattered here and there ; empty creels overturned beside small mounds of turf. Some three or four men, with bare heads and arms, worked diligently at a hole with pick and spade ; other sat smoking beside the fires ; others had picked out from the confused mass of stones some well-known grave, and stood by it, drinking and shouting between whiles ; while in the midst of all this stood the coffin, lidless, with the ashen face of the corpse turned blankly to the sky. With a shrug of the shoulders, I descended the hill and entered the graveyard, the better to view what was being done. No sooner, however, had my feet touched the sacred ground than a sickening odour, which seemed to permeate the whole air, met my nostrils, and made me pause. Faugh ! it was like a charnel-house. I turned my face to the sea, which washed upon the sands, a few hundred yards below me, and its fresh, invigorating breath swept away the pestilence which seemed to rise like vapour from the earth. I stepped forward, and, glancing keenly around, took in the whole situation. A nearer view showed me what I had not seen before. Several figures lying prone amidst the scattered *debris* of rocks and stones, snoring in a heavy, drunken sleep ; others, perched upon the graves, sat drinking and disputing, and in their wild excitement almost coming to blows. Close to the grave which was

being newly made, a woman sat crying over the skull of an infant, which she had buried years before, and which had been thrown out of the earth by the pickaxe, now busily at work again ; while the shrieks and moans which were given forth on every side drowned the sound even of the washing of the sea. While noting all this I had been diligently making my way towards the spot where the coffin stood, when suddenly my foot caught against some invisible object, and I fell. Again came that sickening odour which had at first offended my nostrils, but this time it was so strong and so offensive that it almost made me faint. I scrambled to my feet, joined the group around the nearest fire, and having partaken of the whisky which was so liberally handed round, I returned to the spot where I had fallen, determined to examine the ground and discover, if possible, the cause of the sickening smell. I had fallen across a square pile of stones, which was raised some two or three inches above the ground. By the waning light of the sky I could see no more, but having possessed myself of a torch, and looked again, I opened my eyes in amazement, for the stones covered a coffin, the other half of which was thrust into the ground. The coffin was rotting, the seams yawning, and down its sides was running a greenish matter, the odour from which had met my nostrils, and was now poisoning the whole air. With a shudder I turned away, and, taking my torch in my hand, examined several other graves, some of which I found in the same condition ; others, if possible, a little worse. I had examined the fourth grave when I was suddenly joined by Shawn, who had been carousing at the other end of the graveyard, and who now came up to express his joy at seeing me there.

‘Shawn,’ I said, pointing to the graves, ‘what on earth induces your people to bury the dead like that?’

‘Like what, yer honor?’

‘Why, with one-half of the coffin in the ground, the other half left uncovered to create a pestilence in the place?’

‘Is it the shtones yer honor manes? Well, well, that’s a funny way to spake o’ them. Sure, there isn’t enough room for the whole o’ them; the graves is choked full already, and some o’ them, like Pat Murphy, must make do wid a little bit o’ room.’

‘But think of the consequences of that; the odour which comes from the graves is enough to breed a fever.’

‘The smell is it? Sure, that comes from the grass, yer honor; ’tis a queer grass that grows here, and they’re sayin’ it has a queer charm about it. Och, murder!’ he suddenly screamed, ‘boys, boys, here comes the sog-garth!’

The effect was miraculous; in a moment the whole party rose, shrieking and moaning, to their feet, and congregated in a wild crowd around the coffin, which still stood open upon the ground. Some bore in their hands flaming torches, which lit up the faces of the crowd, and the now fast darkening sky. By their light I could see the priest walking with long strides towards the newly-made grave. As he came nearer, the whole crowd uttered a wild shriek, and fell upon their knees.

‘Yer riv’rence, raise up ould Patrick; he died widout confessin’, on account o’ yer riv’rence bein’ away, and his soul, God bless it, will nivir risht in peace.’

Without a word, the priest walked quietly up to the coffin and blessed the dead bōdy; then he moved to the open grave and blessed the soil; then he spoke quietly to the people.

‘’Tis not in the power of mortal man to raise up the dead,’ he said; ‘that belongs only to Almighty God. Cormic, screw the lid on to the coffin, make haste to bury the dead, and do not disgrace the sacredness of the occasion by drunkenness and riot. Good-night, my dear people, may God bless your work!’

Having spoken thus, he mingled with the crowd, and quickly disappeared.

For a time the whole crowd stood petrified; then the carpenter stepped slowly forward, and began to screw the lid on to the coffin, and the whole of the company began

moaning and yelling, while the body was finally consigned to the earth. I took a seat upon the hillside, and waited till the work was over and most of the mourners had gone away, then I too arose, and took my departure. It was growing towards ten o'clock—the sky was studded with stars, and the moon, full and bright, poured her rays upon the earth—she lit up the graveyard, the withered grass and stones, the grey embers of the dead fires, the broken jars and the drinking vessels, the black figures, coiled snake-like upon the ground in a heavy, drunken slumber, while from the recesses of the black hills around came the faint echo of riotous voices, which proceeded from the drunken revellers who were making their way home. I turned to my companion, who stood beside me, silent and shamefaced.

‘Well, Shawn, was I not right? Had the priest the power to raise up old Murphy?’

‘Troth, he had thin, if he had the wish to do it,’ said Shawn doggedly; and I saw that if I argued till the sun rose, I should not convince him of his folly in so believing; so I nodded ‘good-night,’ and walked in silence towards the Lodge.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN I passed through the village that night, I suspected there must be something wrong. I saw dark shapes flitting hither and thither like spirit forms, while my ears seemed to detect strange sounds of wailing sorrow. I stood and listened and looked about me; but seeing no one whom I could question, I decided that the mystery must be connected with the proceedings of the day, and feeling tolerably well satisfied with the explanation, I walked on towards home.

Here a new surprise awaited me. On opening the door, and stepping into the hall, I was met by Oona pale as a ghost, and trembling violently.

‘Oh, Jack!’ she cried, ‘do you think it is true?’

She took my arm, and drew me into the dining-room; where I found Biddy and Amy, looking pale and frightened too. Then I saw that Oona had been crying.

‘Oh, Jack,’ she sobbed, as I put my arm about her, and laid her head upon my shoulder, ‘have you heard? do you know—but it’s too dreadful—it *can’t* be true!’

Thoroughly mystified by this time, I did my best to compose the girls; then, in answer to my inquiry, Oona told me that Conolly had been killed.

‘Killed!’ I exclaimed.

‘I think so, Jack,’ said Oona; ‘they say he was shot on the Gulranny road this evening. Papa, Aileen, and Nora have ridden off to the spot where they say he fell, and Kate started ten minutes ago to see if she could learn anything about it at the barrack.’

The news coming thus suddenly upon me gave me a shock; but a moment’s reflection served partly to dispel my fear. I remembered Conolly’s former escapades, and smiled.

‘Don’t excite yourselves,’ I said, as the frightened girls clustered about me; ‘depend upon it that whoever is killed Mr Conolly is safe.’

But speak as I would, laugh as I might, I was utterly unable to dispel the awful depression which had fallen upon the Lodge. We clustered close together, and sat down by the fire to await the return of my uncle and the girls; and, in answer to my questions, Oona told me the little that she knew.

‘We were just going to have our tea,’ she said, ‘and were all together in the dining-room, when Shawn rushed in, as white as death, and told us that Mr O’Neil was shot. Well, we were all fearfully excited, and papa and Kate were starting for the Castle, when what should we see but Mr O’Neil’s car, with Mr O’Neil on it, dash furiously past. For a while after that we could learn nothing—the whole village seemed to be in commotion—people were gliding about like ghosts. Papa was on the point of starting for the barrack, when ‘Michael, the ferry,’

came up and told us that as Mr O'Neil had been driving along the Gulranny road he had been shot at by some one hidden in a ditch—that he had fired back at a man whom he saw running away, and that the man fell dead !’

‘The man was Conolly ?’

‘Yes, Jack, Conolly !’

Still, I could not believe it ; so I suggested that before accepting the gloomiest side of the picture, we should wait for Kathleen's news.

So we clustered together round the dining-room hearth ; and, for the first time since my arrival in Storport, I felt that I was really among the landlord shooters. We sat like ghosts in the firelight—saying little, listening for Kate's footfall, but hearing only the loud ticking of the clock. Half-an-hour—an hour passed, and Kathleen did not return. We all grew restless, and Oona suggested that I should walk down to the barrack and meet Kate. At first I refused, being loath to leave the three girls alone,—but presently my curiosity overcame me ; I yielded, and after a secret but anxious embrace from Oona in the hall, I set out.

It was a dark, cold, gloomy night ; scarcely any soul seemed to be abroad ; but again I fancied I heard about me a mixture of mysterious sounds. Having reached the high road, I was conscious of figures moving about me like ghosts in the darkness, but instead of pausing to inquire the news, I made straight for the barrack. Here I found a little more life—the barrack was lit up—two policemen, well armed, were on guard—while around the building lingered several figures, quite indistinguishable in the darkness. On mentioning my name, and asking for Kathleen, I was at once admitted, and came face to face with my cousin, who was talking to some policemen in the hall. Kathleen looked very pale, her eyes were wet, and when I took her hand, I felt that it was cold as ice.

‘Is it true, Kate ?’ I asked, for want of something else to say.

‘Quite true,’ returned Kate tremulously; ‘poor Conolly!’ and she hid her face for a moment, and sobbed.

‘Where is he?’

‘He is here—he was carried straight here, and will remain till after the inquest to-morrow.’

‘I should like to see him.’

‘Very well,’ said Kate, ‘you can see him if you like, Jack; but I think I’ll wait for you here. I have had one glimpse of him, and it has unnerved me terribly. I couldn’t stand it again.’

Kathleen was certainly terribly unnerved; seeing this, I offered to take her home at once, but as I had expressed a wish to see Conolly, she insisted on my doing so. One of the policemen offered to escort me, so, with a strange sense of sickness upon me, I walked away.

We passed along a bare, dimly-lighted passage, and entered a room. The room was in darkness, but upon my guide advancing a few steps, and holding up the candle which he carried, I saw before me the prostrate figure of a man. He lay upon a wooden stretcher in the middle of the room. The sight was so ghastly that for a moment my courage seemed to be failing me. At one glance I had recognised Conolly, changed as he was. He was completely dressed, but his ragged clothes were soaked with bogmire and bespattered with blood—his face had been wiped, but some of the black which he had used as a mask still clung to his cheeks and mouth; his pale blue eyes were open, and his teeth were set as if with intense pain. I gazed for a moment, then with a sigh I turned away.

On my return to the hall, Kathleen and I set out at once—both, I fancy, feeling rather glad to be away from the place where poor murdered Conolly lay.

‘I suppose, Kate,’ I said, as soon as we found ourselves alone, ‘Mr O’Neil has committed this murder?’

‘No,’ returned Kate; ‘not Mr O’Neil, but a young

Englishman, a friend of his, who was visiting the Castle and who happened to be on the car.'

'Then it was Mr O'Neil who was fired at?'

'Yes. He received the usual notice it seems, several weeks ago, and consequently avoided the Gulranny road until to-day, when he believed the storm had passed. The young stranger had been seal shooting in Gulranny bay, and knowing the state of the country, he kept his rifle loaded on the way home. When the shots were fired, the horse bolted, and, if Mr Gregory had been alone as usual, nothing more would have been known of the affair; but his friend, who is a mere boy, got excited, jumped off the car, ran back to the spot, and shot Conolly through the heart as he was trying to make his escape.'

'Was he alone?'

'No; there were two with him, I believe—the police fired on them, but they escaped.'

By this time we reached the Lodge, and found the dining-room occupied by an excited group. My uncle, Nora, and Aileen, who had returned, looking weary and pained, still wore their riding dresses; so did Achill Murry, and young Bingley; while Father John, and Dr Maguire, were bespattered with mud with hard walking. Most of them were drinking the grog, of which they seemed sorely in need—while they were discussing, in eager whispers, the horrible event of the day.

'Kate,' said my uncle, when we appeared, 'can you put us all up for the night? We're summoned, all but his reverence, on the coroner's jury to-morrow, and 'tis late for his reverence and the doctor to be walking home.'

I saw a terribly anxious look come into Kate's eyes as she said, putting her hand on his shoulder,—

'Then *you* are summoned too, papa?'

'Sure enough, *mavourneen*; they've taken the young Englishman prisoner, and we're to say to-morrow whether he's to be tried for manslaughter or set free.

‘And which of the two do ye mane to do, Mr Kenmare?’ asked the doctor.

‘What *can* we do, doctor? After all, the young fellow can’t be blamed, for he did it in self-defence. Poor, poor Conolly! he was always weak and easily led, and don’t I know he’s not to blame either. The villain that set the whole thing going, and deserves the punishment, is talking it over at this moment by his own fireside.’

For a moment there was silence. I saw Kathleen quietly close and fasten the shutters, a thing I had never known her do before. Then she left the room to see about accommodating her visitors for the night. The silence was at length broken by Father John.

‘And so you really think, Mr Kenmare,’ said he, ‘that Mr Conolly never fired that shot?’

My uncle sighed.

‘Not at all, Father John,’ said he. ‘I’m certain sure the poor fellow *did* fire it, and if he hadn’t been shot dead, I believe he’d have fired another. The second barrel of the gun he used is loaded almost to the muzzle, and even now the forefinger of his right hand is bent, which shows that he died as he was about to pull the trigger.’

While the conversation was general, I, who really knew little or nothing of the subject, held my peace; but after most of the company had retired for the night, and only four of us, my uncle, Kathleen, Oona, and myself were left alone. I asked an explanation of my uncle’s words.

‘Who do you think,’ I said, ‘is at the bottom of this affair?’

Before replying, my uncle looked cautiously round the room, opened the door suddenly, shut it again, then returned to his seat.

‘Jack, my boy,’ he said, speaking very low, ‘there isn’t a man in Storport but knows who’s at the bottom of it, including Father John himself. Listen; there’s one, a Mr Timlin—brother-in-law to Mrs Timlin, and therefore a kind of relation to Conolly, who lives in Gulranny.

He is a well-to-do farmer. For years he has rented a rabbit warren, which lies close to his farm. A few weeks ago O'Neil took the warren from him, and shortly afterwards received sentence of death. It was this man's gun which was found by Conolly's side, and it was this very man, who, a few minutes after the skirmish to-day, galloped into Gulranny and said that O'Neil was killed! He's a dirty, low blackguard, that fears the gallows! He wanted O'Neil put out of the way, and he couldn't find a better man than Conolly to do it; so he supplied him with a gun, and plenty of whisky, and galloped home with the news, in order to clear himself.'

'You think that?'

'I'm certain of it!'

'And you could swear to the gun?'

'Among a hundred!'

'Then if that's the case, it's a pity the man can't be punished.'

'Do you think so?'

'Don't you?'

My uncle shook his head.

'We couldn't bring poor Conolly back any way,' he said, 'so 'tis better to let it rest.'

All that night I scarcely slept; at seven o'clock in the morning I was out of the house, walking with Oona, whom I found restlessly pacing the gravel before the hall-door. I took her hand upon my arm, and we walked through the village together. Although it was so early, everybody seemed to be astir, and everywhere along the road small groups of men and women gathered talking eagerly, while the barrack was besieged by a regular crowd; the cold feeling of death seemed to have got in the air, and everybody was changed; the people scarcely looked at us at all; when they did, it was with a sullen, sinister look of mingled fear and dislike. I fancy Oona noticed this, and understood it far better than I, for she clung in a half-frightened way to my arm as if to protect me.

We had finished our walk and were on our way back

to the Lodge, when in passing the barrack gate we suddenly came face to face with Mrs Timlin. She looked angry and excited ; she stopped directly before Oona, and exclaimed,—

‘The dirty black-hearted rogues. Do you know what they’ve done, Miss Oona? Afther murthering poor Conolly, they’ve taken Toney Timlin and locked him up in the barrack !’

‘What for?’ asked Oona; ‘what do they say he has done, Mrs Timlin?’

After a defiant stare at me, Mrs Timlin replied,—

‘They *say* he was in wid Conolly in his plans to shoot the mashter—bad cess to him ! but sure they’ll have to *prove* it ; and there isn’t a soul in Storport would swear away the life of an innocent boy.’

Oona uttered a few sympathetic words, and we passed on.

At breakfast that morning all the conversation turned upon the one absorbing theme. I told of the interview we had had with Mrs Timlin, and of the news she gave ; and I fancied my uncle looked troubled. Again I felt mystified ; I had imagined that the police had acted wisely in taking the real offender into custody :—one glance around the table showed me that in this opinion I stood completely alone.

The inquest was to be held early ;—as soon, therefore, as breakfast was over, those who had been summoned started off. I remained behind for a while to brighten up the spirits of the girls, but I found it a hopeless business. All their old liveliness had departed,—and the very Lodge itself seemed to have been transformed into the dreariness of a tomb. Finding myself of so little use to the girls, I at length turned my thoughts to myself, remembered the letters which I had received by post that morning, and instinctively looked around for Oona. She was nowhere to be seen. I went up to her room; quietly opened the door, and there I found her sitting by her writing-desk with her face buried in her hands. I fancy she heard me enter,

but she did not move. I went over, put my arms around her, and laid her pretty head on my shoulder.

‘Oona, my pet, why are you crying?’

‘I—I didn’t mean to cry,’ sobbed Oona, as she hid her face on my shoulder, ‘but I went down to see him, and it nearly broke my heart . . . Oh, Jack, it is terrible!’

I held her closely to me, and let her cry a little; while my body trembled through and through as her soft hands clung to mine; then I said tenderly,—

‘Oona, I want to talk to you about myself to-day.’

‘Yes, Jack.’

‘I got letters this morning which demand my return to town.’

I felt Oona start, and I fancied she crept a little bit closer to me; but she said nothing.

‘I have had a very pleasant holiday,’ I continued, ‘thanks to my Connaught Cousins. I ought to be satisfied, but I find I’m not; when I read those letters this morning, I felt as if they had brought me sentence of death! Oona, my darling, I love you!’

This time Oona raised her head.

‘Then you will come back?’ she said. ‘Oh, Jack, if you love me you will not leave me long.’

‘That shall be as you wish, my pet. But think well, Oona. Could you bear to leave Storport, your friends, your horses, your hammock, your dreams, for *me*?’

‘No,’ said Oona, smiling a little through her tears, ‘I shall not leave them, Jack. We will always come back to dear old Ireland once a year, and I will bring my dreams to London with me to brighten up your rooms if I can. Dear Jack, I will try to be very good to you; only I feel it is sinful to feel so happy when I think of poor Conolly.’

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When the luncheon bell sounded, Oona and I were still sitting by the window dreaming. We descended the stairs together, and found a large company awaiting us in the dining-room. There was my uncle, and Father

John, Dr Maguire, Murry, and young Bingley, besides the clergyman, and one or two other gentlemen, who were strangers to me. I asked what they had done.

‘It’s all over, Jack,’ returned my uncle. ‘Of course we’ve acquitted the young Englishman, but I believe Mr Toney Timlin is to be tried at Gulranny court.’

CHAPTER XXIV.

How the next few days passed I scarcely know. For two evenings I accompanied some of the girls to Mrs Timlin’s kitchen, and we mingled amongst the crowd which had collected together to do the last honours to Conolly. On the morning of the third day it seemed to me that the whole of the village had turned out to see the poor fellow laid in his grave. It had been a grand wake, and it was a grand funeral, but I for one was glad when it was over, thinking that at length popular excitement would die away. But I was wrong. When we got home from the funeral, my uncle’s expressive face showed me that something was wrong. I soon found what it was. Some words of his had got abroad, and he had been summoned as a witness against Toney Timlin at Gulranny court.

‘I’ve to go in to-morrow, Jack,’ said my uncle, ‘so if you want to see the clearing up of this affair, you had better come . . . Shawn, you rascal,’ he added, ‘have Lucy and Jack saddled by nine in the morning, and see they’re in condition for a gallop.’

Punctually at nine in the morning the horses were at the Lodge door, and I, after having taken an affectionate farewell of Oona, mounted Jack, and, accompanied by my uncle, galloped off along the Gulranny road. I was in excellent spirits, and anxious to reach the scene

of action, for in truth I was eager to avenge poor Conolly's death.

'At last,' I said to myself, 'the real offender will be punished, and poor Conolly's death avenged.'

On our arrival, we found the court crammed to suffocation, and Toney Timlin, the lowest-looking black-guard I had ever set eyes on—had already taken his place in the dock. My uncle, being a witness, was sent to the waiting-room, but I was permitted to take my seat in the body of the court. I watched the proceedings with interest; I saw the witnesses enter the box, and perjure themselves deliberately: then came my uncle's turn, and I sighed, relieved, thinking 'at last the truth will be spoken, and a death-blow will be given to all that has gone before.'

My uncle seemed scarcely himself—a fact which somewhat amazed me, since I knew that his evidence, though of great importance, was of the most straightforward kind. He was certainly not easy in his mind; he answered the first few questions honestly enough; then the gun, the very one which poor Conolly had used, was put into his hand.

'Have you ever seen that gun before?'

My uncle nodded.

'I have.'

'When?'

'Three days ago, at Storport barrack.'

'Was that the first time you saw it?'

'I don't know.'

'You know the prisoner?'

'I do.'

'Have you ever seen him with a gun?'

'I have.'

'With this gun?'

Again my uncle shook his head.

'I don't know.'

'Do you mean to assert, on your oath, Mr Kenmare, that this gun is not the property of the prisoner at the bar?'

'No; neither do I assert that it is—guns are so

much alike, I wouldn't swear either one way or the other.'

So the evidence closed, and that very day I saw the prisoner walk out of court a free man.

'Come, Jack, my boy,' said my uncle, taking my arm and leading me through the crowd to the place where our horses awaited us. 'We promised the girls to get back early; so prepare yourself for a good gallop home.'

I mounted my horse in silence; in silence too we galloped fully two miles along the road; then we pulled up our horses a bit, and I asked my uncle why he refused to swear to the gun.

'You could have got that black-looking villain out of the way for some time to come.'

'Sure, don't I know it, Jack, and there isn't a boy in Storport deserves it more.'

'Then why, in Heaven's name, didn't you do it?'

He gave a cautious look about him, and sunk his voice to a whisper, before he replied.

'The word they wanted me to speak would have been my own death-warrant!'

'Good God!' I exclaimed; 'they would never dare harm *you*!—you must be mistaken; I can't believe it!'

He quietly put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a piece of paper.

'That doesn't look very important, does it, Jack?' said he; 'but when I received it last night, I knew that if I spoke the word that sent Mr Timlin to gaol to-day, you would most likely return to the Lodge to-night carrying my dead body along with you. Well, I daresay you think I'm a bit of a coward, Jack; perhaps I am, for the receipt of that paper unhinged me. If I had only had myself to think of, I should have spoken out bold, and defied them all, but I remembered my girls at home. I pictured to myself what they would feel, sitting together round the dead body of their old father, and, for the life of me, I couldn't speak!'

At this I could say nothing—I was thinking of Oona.

Eight o'clock: dinner was over, and we were all collected in the cosy drawing-room of the Lodge. The girls seemed a little dull, and even my uncle's jolly face was somewhat overcast. It was the last evening of my stay in Storport. Yes, my visit had in truth come to an end; my packages were all done up—most of my farewells had been said; and at nine o'clock in the morning, I should mount the car which was destined to bear me away.

It was a cold winter night; outside the snow was falling heavily, but all was cosy comfort within. The girls had donned their brightest costumes, though they could not don their brightest faces, and one and all seemed to take intense delight in calling me 'brother' Jack! In sooth, they hung about me, and so liberally supplied me with kisses that I was obliged in sheer self-defence to seek protection from Oona. . . . She was sitting in a corner of the room, busily at work tying up a package which was evidently intended for me. When I went to her, she looked up, half-shyly, half-pleased, and said,—

'There, Jack, they are quite ready.'

'What are they, dear?'

Oona frowned.

'Forgetful boy!—as if you didn't know. They are my manuscripts—you are to get me a publisher for them—'

'Of course—I haven't forgotten—but, Oona, I don't mean to have them published until—'

'Until—'

'Well, until you can put some other name upon the fly-leaf than *Oona Kenmare!*'

Not soon shall I forget the parting at the door next morning; with my uncle's kindly face beaming upon me, and the girls clinging around me. At last, with a hug all

round, and one special embrace to Oona, I was off. The car dashed down the avenue, and out on to the lonely road. Looking backward I saw the village, where I had known so much kindness, and seen so much sorrow. On the roadside, Shawn, his father, and all his sisters and brothers, were waiting with many more to bid me 'good-bye.' Poor Irish souls! As I looked into their wild faces, and pressed their hands, I thought of their many virtues, their simple affections, their deep and cruel wrongs (for wronged the Irish have been, God knows!), and I said to myself, with one whose soul was large with human kindness, though he fell upon a stormy time, 'God bless Ireland!'

As the car paused on the summit of the hill, I saw my uncle and the girls at the Lodge gate watching me go—and, standing up with a full heart, I waved 'good-bye' to my 'Connaught Cousins.'

